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SUPER TUESDAY!

VOTE DUNKELZAHN
FOR PRESIDENT

FASA CORPORATION

BY STEVE KENSON

SHADOWRUN

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FOR PRESIDENT

FASA
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SUPER TUESDAY

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—To everyone from the Scrawls from the Sprawls cyberpunk APA for all of their feedback and encouragement.

SHADOWLAND V2.0

"I have taken all knowledge to be my province."—Francis Bacon

"Humankind cannot bear very much reality."—T. S. Eliot

A WORD FROM OUR SPONSOR:

WOW! Can we live in a more exciting time? The boards have been abuzz since Dunkelzahn's announcement. The shadows seemed to explode overnight. Humanis is on the warpath, and anti-metahuman fervor is the highest since the Night of Rage (or so a few old-timers have told me). The Shadowland staff is working overtime trying to make sense of it all and give you the scoop as soon as we can. So check your sources and let us know *now* what's happening on the street. Things are changing so fast that information is ammunition.

THE BACK STOCK

New Magic Download (The Awakened World all spelled out)
Fields of Fire Download (Guns, Guns, Guns, & Guns)
Cybertech Download (Man, Machine and Magic ...)
Campaign 2057 (Vote early, vote often!)

GO TO COMPLETE LIBRARY ARCHIVES

THE DAILY SPECIAL

California Free State (From Tir to Aztlan and everything in between)

We're livin' in a nuyen-rich world, chummer! Today we're offering the CFS in one neat bundle, so check it out—if chaos makes nuyen, then California is the place you oughta be. It's big, it has its own dragon and nearly every piece of flesh in the country is for sale. We got water wars, elf wars, simsense star wars, magical tree wars—it's the land of fun, sun and run!

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COMING SOON

Threats (Secret stuff)
Yeah, that's *it*. You get what we got, and that's what we got. So sue us.

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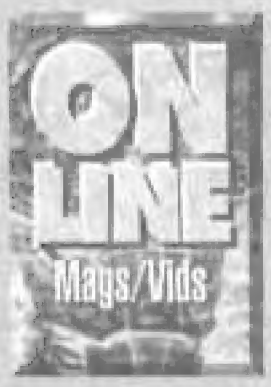
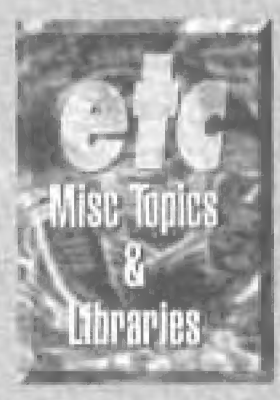




NEWS

ABSENTEE BALLOTS ON THEIR WAY

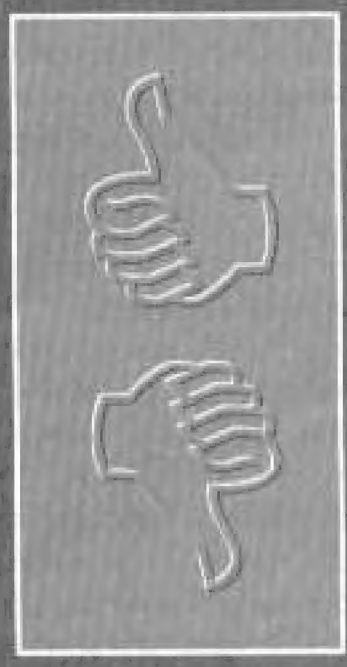
The UCAS bigwigs are telling folks that absentee ballots are in the mail. Use those extra SIN numbers to send in your vote! Heck, you might win prizes! Click here for the UCAS press release.

HUMANIS FIGHTS BACK

Everybody's favorite racists are back for more. Word on the street is, they've taken the fight to the pavement against Vogel's, Hernandez's, and even the Big D's campaign HQs. Plus the usual harassment of metahuman neighborhoods in smaller burgs throughout the UCAS. Click here to join the good fight.

EARLY POLLS ARE IN

Gonna be a close one, folks. Dunkelzahn enters the race and takes over the lead spot with 21% of the voting public. The others follow with Brackhaven at 19%, Vogel at 18%, Yeats at 10%, Hernandez at 9% and Booth at a laughable 1%. Undecided is the big winner, just ahead of the Big D at 22%. Click here to get the breakdowns.



WEIRD STUFF

The candidates are signed up, so click here to get the dirt only we can provide. What's with Vogel and TerraFirst? What's the deal with the Illuminates of the New Dawn? Brackhaven and Humanis ... how tight are they? Dunkelzahn—is there any dirt at all? Check us out.

It's 8:49:17. Do you know where your meat body is?

INTRODUCTION

Super Tuesday is a collection of roleplaying adventures set in the Awakened world of **Shadowrun** during a whirlwind election campaign for the UCAS presidency. The year is 2057. Advances in technology are astonishing, with humans able to blend with computers and travel through that electronic netherworld of data known as the Matrix. Even more astonishing is the return of magic. Elves, dwarfs, dragons, orks, and trolls have reassumed their true forms, while megacorporations (rather than superpowers) rule much of the world. Moving through this world like hushed whispers in the night are the shadowrunners. No one admits their existence, but no one else can do their secret work.

Though government power is giving way to megacorporate money in 2057, politicians and national leaders remain a force to be reckoned with in many places. The adventures in **Super Tuesday** are all connected to the race for the presidency of the United Canadian and American States, a national office whose holder was at one time considered the Leader of the Free World. That description may no longer be true, but the position of president still carries considerable power and prestige ... and to some people, those things are more important than nuyen.

Welcome to the political shadows, chummers. This time it's for keeps.

GAMEMASTERING NOTES

Super Tuesday is significantly different from the standard **Shadowrun** adventure. The five short adventures that make up the overall story line are not directly connected to each other, but they all share a common backdrop—the UCAS in the grip of election fever. Each adventure contains a short biography of the candidate involved in that adventure (as a central player or a peripheral figure), a fictional prologue and an **Introduction.** These three sections define each adventure and its place in the election campaign.

Though the player characters may find themselves in high demand for such shadowruns as the political arena heats up and the candidates flog their agendas across the country, the gamemaster may choose to run these adventures between events already planned for his **Shadowrun** campaign. Because the campaign period is unusually short for this emergency election, however, the runners may just as easily find themselves plunged into one political assignment after another.

The adventures in **Super Tuesday** combine decision-tree and linear story formats. For each adventure, the player characters may arrive at different locations in the story via different paths, or follow one event in the story directly into the next. The gamemaster should think of each adventure as the bare-bones plot and should feel free to make any changes necessary to flesh it out and give his players more choices. To aid the gamemaster in this task, the individual chapters of each adventure include suggestions for gamemastering the various situations that may arise. **Super Tuesday** is designed for a team of four to six shadowrunners with a wide variety of talents.

SHADOWRUN RULES

To run **Super Tuesday,** the gamemaster needs a thorough familiarity with the material in this book, as well as a working knowledge of the **Shadowrun, Second Edition (SRII)** rules. The gamemaster should also be familiar with the expanded magic rules in the **Grimoire, Second Edition (Grimoire II)**, and the revised Matrix rules of **Virtual Realities 2.0 (VR2)**. In order to run the adventure **Casualties of War,** the gamemaster should be familiar with the **Bug City** sourcebook. Aside from the fictional biographies presented at the beginning of each adventure, all the information contained in **Super Tuesday** is for the gamemaster's eyes only.

All specific information, particularly game statistics, appears in **SRII** format. Gamemasters still using the first-edition **Shadowrun** rules will need to make a few adjustments to non-player character, weapon and spell statistics.

MAKING SUCCESS TESTS

During the course of **Super Tuesday**, the players will make a number of Success Tests using a skill and a given target number. These Success Tests are indicated by the name of the skill, followed by the target number in parentheses. For example, a Sorcery (5) Test refers to a Sorcery Success Test against a Target Number of 5.

SUCCESS TABLES

At times, the gamemaster will use success tables to determine how much information the players receive from inquiries and investigations. Each success table lists different information obtained for differing numbers of die roll successes. Rolling a higher number of successes always reveals the information for the lower numbers of successes as well. For example, a character rolling 3 successes would learn the information for 3 successes, and also the information for 1 and 2 successes.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Aside from the **SRII** rules and those in the sourcebooks listed above, this book includes all the information needed to run **Super Tuesday.** The gamemaster should read through each adventure before attempting to run it. Some important plot developments do not become apparent until well into each adventure, but the gamemaster must lay the groundwork for these developments early on. He or she can only accomplish that by being familiar with each story line.

Though **Super Tuesday** as written tries to cover all the likely and even some of the unlikely ideas that the players might come

up with, it is impossible to foresee every possible action the players might choose to take. Therefore, the gamemaster must be prepared to improvise if necessary.

Each adventure begins with a short biographical section and a fictional prologue. The prologue gives the gamemaster a feel for the setting of the adventure. The biographical section includes background information about the candidates, formatted as electronic documents from the Shadowland message board. Similar to **Shadowrun** sourcebooks, these documents contain "black information" from various fictional characters in the **Shadowrun** world, and these comments may or may not be truthful, accurate, considered, or clearly thought out—though they may be all those things. The gamemaster may photocopy the biographical information for the players, or allow them to read it themselves. The **Introduction** following the biography and prologue explains the nature and specific background of each adventure. The sections within each adventure follow standard **Shadowrun** format. Most of them contain four parts: **Tell It to Them Straight, Hooks, Behind the Scenes,** and **Debugging.**

Tell It to Them Straight is read aloud to the players. It describes where the player characters are and what is happening to them as though they were actually there. Depending on the player characters' previous choices and/or the point in the adventure at which the encounter occurs, the gamemaster may need to adapt the text to suit the situation.

The second section, **Hooks,** gives the gamemaster hints and tips about imagery to use in the scene, emotions to convey, sounds, sensations, textures, and so on. The information provided in this section varies in form and content from scene to scene, ranging from general themes to specific emotions.

The next section, **Behind the Scenes,** tells the gamemaster what is really happening in each encounter and proposes a potential sequence of events. Any maps needed to play an encounter are included in this section. Information the players can discover and possible consequences of the player characters' actions also appear here. Non-player character statistics needed to roleplay the encounter are usually included here as well. This section may also contain hints and suggestions for handling a particular encounter.

The final section of each encounter, **Debugging,** offers suggestions for getting the story back on track if things go too far wrong; for example, if the player characters overlook a vital piece of data or if half the team meets an untimely death. The gamemaster need not use any of the suggestions given in this section; if he or she has a better method of redirecting the game, he should feel free to use it. As always, the gamemaster may also let the chips fall where they may.

At the end of each adventure, **Picking Up the Pieces** provides tips on wrapping up the adventure and awarding Karma, as well as offering suggestions for answering unresolved player or player character questions.

PREPARING THE ADVENTURES

It is impossible to create a published adventure that provides the appropriate opposition level for every group of player characters. Some groups are inherently more powerful than others.

The gamemaster must adjust the game statistics and capabilities of the published opposition to provide an appropriate level of difficulty for the group. If an adventure does not suit the player characters' strengths and weaknesses, the gamemaster may use the published version as an outline to develop an adventure of his or her own. Or, if it works well except for a quirk here and there, the gamemaster can change any part of the plot and story events to make the adventure a better one for the players.

Each adventure suggests Threat and Professional Ratings for each of the NPCs. As explained in **Shadowrun, Second Edition,** use Threat Rating dice in place of Dice Pools for these characters (p. 187, **SRII**). Gamemasters should adjust the actual Threat Ratings to better reflect the level of opposition presented by the player characters, especially in those adventures where maintaining game balance promises to be exceptionally tricky. The gamemaster should feel free to modify Threat Rating dice on the fly during an encounter to provide the proper level of opposition. To that end, the text occasionally includes notes on how tough a battle or encounter should be for the player characters.

The gamemaster will find such manipulation crucial to keeping some of the encounters in each adventure at a manageable level. The fights in **Super Tuesday** work best when choreographed like an action movie. Though lead and magic flies everywhere, only a few of the bad guys actually get a clean shot at the heroes at any one time. That limitation, and the application of the **SRII** Professional Rating rules, should help keep large-scale fights under control.

For gamemasters using the first-edition **Shadowrun** rules, the Professional Rating system works as follows. Non-player characters with a Professional Rating of 1 will withdraw from a fight after taking a Light wound, those rated at 2 will withdraw after taking a Moderate wound, those rated at 3 after a Serious wound, and those rated at 4 will fight until unconscious or dead.

EVENTS AND BACKGROUND

In mid-2056, the great dragon Dunkelzahn was awarded UCAS citizenship by an act of Congress that produced a 15-minute media blitz (quickly forgotten as soon as the new Urban Brawl scores came along). The prospect of taxing the dragon's holdings was just too juicy for the UCAS government to resist, to say nothing of the value of capturing the Awakened vote in an election year. Of course, the Big D's holdings were too well-sheltered to produce the hoped-for financial bonanza and the decision generated some anti-Awakened backlash, but most people took little notice of the whole affair once the initial shock wore off. As part of the citizenship deal with the UCAS, Dunkelzahn "moved" his home into the UCAS proper. Dunkelzahn now lists as his primary residence Prince Edward Island, off the northern coast of the state of Maine and the eastern coast of the old country of Canada. His VisionQuest park, however, remains in Lake Louise. Dunkelzahn has also established homes in New York City, the Federal District of Columbia and Toronto.

THE ELECTION OF 2056

Except for the media swarm following the Dunkelzahn decision, the election of 2056 was a dull affair even to those who care about such things. The incumbents, President Thomas Steele and Vice President James Booth, won the election after a lackluster campaign season to which few voters actually paid attention.

Steele and Booth took the Technocratic Party into the White House through the back door, having vaulted into office in late 2052 without having won that year's election. Thomas Steele was Vice President to then-President Alan Adams, a Democrat elected to a second term in 2052. When President Adams died suddenly mere weeks after the 2052 election, Steele stepped into the presidential shoes and named Secretary of State James Booth as vice president. Their unexpected ascension gave the Technocrats control of the highest office of the UCAS, as well as pole position on the main road to the White House in 2056. Thomas Steele's famous "handshake" with Dunkelzahn launched the Technocrats to the top of the polls in mid-2056, a position they never left. The election seemed to be a foregone conclusion; indeed, most of the media-watchers declared the Steele/Booth team victorious just a few hours after the polls closed. The Technocrats seemed to be on a roll.

In early 2057, however, a scandal of unheard-of proportions rocked the UCAS. The "dullest election of the 21st century," as the media dubbed it, turned out to have been rigged ... apparently with the approval of the highest office in the land. The "remote vote" system, put in place decades ago, fell victim to electronic tampering by "person or persons unknown," casting doubt on the legitimacy of the Steele/Booth victory. In response, Congress launched an immediate investigation that resulted in the impeachment of the president and vice-president. When she was named interim president, Speaker of the House Betty Jo Pritchard (R-ONT) became, by default, the first female president of the UCAS. Acting President Pritchard would hold that position until new, untainted elections could be held. Now the voting public is up in arms, and the politicos in DeeCee are throwing scapegoats to the hungry media wolves as quickly as they can find them.

The scandal and the prospect of a new election brings all the political factions in the UCAS (and elsewhere in North America) out of the woodwork. The short campaign time of just under eight months, approved by the UCAS House and Senate, allows fringe parties an unprecedented degree of influence because neither they nor their candidates will be subject to the usual long, drawn-out public scrutiny. For the first time in almost a hundred years, money alone will not win the election. Dissatisfaction with the UCAS's traditional parties is at an all-time high; numerous splinter groups are breaking off and going it on their own. Policlubs start gathering behind their favorite candidates, and politicians and agitators begin hauling out their favorite causes to champion in front of the ever-hungry media machine.

Then the dragon enters the race.

THE ELECTION OF 2057

On March 15, 2057, Dunkelzahn declared his intention to run for president of the UCAS on a special episode of his talk show "Wyrm Talk." He is legally able to do this under the revision to the UCAS Constitution that allows new citizens to become president—a provision originally intended to "grandfather" the citizens of Canada into the electoral process during the formation of the new union between Canada and what was left of the United States. Dunkelzahn's announcement threw the UCAS into total shock and sent the media into a feeding frenzy, each network competing frantically to obtain interviews and put out news specials on the campaign quickly enough to satisfy their eager viewers. The eyes of the world are focused on this political race; will the people of the UCAS really consider voting a dragon into the highest office in their nation?

Dunkelzahn's announcement has also polarized all the factions involved in the election. The Awakened factions are split between metahuman candidates and the strongly pro-Awakened dragon. Anti-metahuman, anti-magical factions like the Humanis Policlub are enraged at the thought of a non-human "mythological monster" becoming president. The political situation is a massive powder-keg of opposing groups, likely to explode at any minute. As the campaign begins its first leg toward the early-August election date, nuyen flows, deals are struck, and enemies work toward each other's downfall. ...

Sounds like the perfect time for a shadowrun.

THE ISSUES

The UCAS presidential campaign turns on several important platform issues, each a matter of great debate between the candidates. Much of the campaign's media coverage revolves around each candidate's stand on the following:

•**Reunification with California.** Many candidates are bringing up California's separation from the UCAS, and several are talking about reclaiming the state (primarily in order to rape ... er, utilize its natural resources). Reuniting California with the UCAS would also regain considerable Pacific Rim presence for the UCAS, as well as effectively surround the Native American Nations. Naturally, no one in the UCAS much cares what Californians think about the idea.

•**Bug City.** The voting public of the UCAS is demanding to know how each presidential wannabe intends to resolve the apparent deadlock in Chicago between the UCAS military and the insect spirits that have taken over the city. All the blame for the Bug City debacle is being foisted off on the previous administration, and anti-Awakened candidates frequently point to Bug City as an example of the inevitable consequences of uncontrolled magic use.

•**Foreign Policy.** How to deal with the NAN and the CAS (see below) are big issues for the average UCAS voter. The "man on the street" in UCAS believes that his country has been pushed around by all the other nations of North America ever since the Ghost Dance brought down the old United States more than forty years ago. In response to this concern, many candidates are talking tough on foreign policy, while others speak of addressing internal problems first before leaping into the political shark-tank of world affairs. With the 2057 campaign season, the UCAS's long history of isolationism may be coming to an end.

•War with the CAS. Threatening rumblings of a new Civil War with the Confederated American States have been going on ever since the CAS's formation. Many people in the UCAS think the CAS has gotten too big for its collective britches, and recent events in North Virginia and the Federal District of Columbia (as played out in the **Shadowrun** novel **Just Compensation**) have only worsened UCAS opinion of the Confederates. Some hawks in the UCAS government are now calling for a war to reclaim the "rebel" states.

•Racial Justice/Awakened Rights. With the resurgence of activity among policlubs and numerous other political factions, metahuman and Awakened groups across the board are clamoring for full civil rights from the UCAS government. The proportion of metahumans in the government since the Awakening has been virtually nil, and metahuman rights remain as strongly disputed an issue in the UCAS as civil rights for people of color were in the 1960s, or gay and lesbian rights were in the 1990s. In addition to the various branches of homo sapiens, the "Awakened rights" movement includes groups demanding legal recognition of sasquatches, free spirits and even ghouls in the wake of events in Chicago that brought about the formation of the first organized ghoul "community." The candidates' views lie across the spectrum—some support integration (sometimes even forced integration), while others are taking a "separate but equal" stance intended to keep varying degrees of distance between metas and "normal" humans.

•The Economy/Corporate Influence. As always, a primary campaign issue is the average citizen's standard of living—"two chickens in every pot." The UCAS economy has been in a slump for quite a while, and the slight improvements during the Adams and Steele presidencies have simply not kept up with inflation, unemployment and the general downward slide of the UCAS as an industrial nation in the world market. Management of the economy to ensure national prosperity is a prime issue for most voters, and a powerful one for all of the candidates.

A related issue, how to handle relations with the powerful megacorporations, is almost a foreign-policy concern by 2057 because the megacorps are virtually nations unto themselves. UCAS prosperity is so tied up with corporate politics that no candidate can ignore the role the corporations will play in the election.

THE CANDIDATES

The major presidential candidates—including Dunkelzahn's independent candidacy—represent the UCAS's diverse political factions. Some of the candidates are marginal while others are strong contenders, but all of them can become important to the story line once things start getting shaken up. Coalition politics is the word of the day, and many traditionally opposed groups find themselves working toward common ends.

Gamemasters can use the fictional **Shadowland** materials (p. 5) as information that the player characters might know, handing out the material before beginning play. The information listed below is for the gamemaster to use at his or her discretion, and allows the gamemaster to feed information to the players as needed. The following text can also be used as game hooks for other adventures set during the election of 2057.

ARTHUR VOGEL
Democratic "One World" Party

Arthur Vogel is a dwarf from Ontario, the only metahuman presidential candidate aside from Dunkelzahn. His running mate, Gary Grey, is a troll, which gives the pair a comical look on the podium. One of the first dwarfs born as a result of UGE, Vogel is in his early 40s. An expert attorney specializing in ecological causes, he worked his way through law school and has built his career on pulling off difficult and delicate negotiations with powerful corporations. Vogel is a dynamic speaker, and many people consider him the courtroom champion of eco-consciousness.

Vogel's campaign platform stresses ecological issues and conservation. His One World Party is dedicated to the idea that the UCAS can only be saved if its citizens first heal the Earth, and that people can only make peace with themselves when they have made peace with the planet. The Democratic Party adopted the One World platform and are backing Vogel all the way; they have allowed him to label himself a Democrat to give him recognition and "respectability," plus enough money and exposure to go from fringe candidate to full-fledged political player in a matter of weeks. The corporations oppose him because he frequently lashes out at them as the root of all evil, and also because he favors higher corporate taxes and greater corporate accountability.

Vice President: Gary Grey, an Eagle shaman, speaks even more strongly than Vogel for ecological restoration. Grey is a powerful speaker in his own right, with a deep, resonant voice that can electrify a crowd. He plays strongly and cleverly on the connection between his totem and the national symbol of the old United States. As a shaman, Grey understands and uses such symbolism well. He speaks of Eagle and the United Canadian and American States in almost the same reverent tone: they are both proud, strong and capable of flying high, and they resist being caged or bound. For Grey, Eagle represents an ideal to which the UCAS should aspire, including respect for the Earth and all of her creatures. This image has a powerful appeal for many voters.

Platform: "Save the Earth"

Vogel's message revolves around the overriding need to save Gaia from destruction. All of his positions and policies stem from the belief that Mother Nature is the ultimate teacher and that governments and corporations could stand to take a few lessons from her. Vogel is also a staunch supporter of metahuman rights, though he tends to draw the line at legal citizenship for such bizarre beings as ghouls and free spirits.

DR. ROZILYN HERNANDEZ
The New Century Party

The New Century Party is a loose coalition of disaffected Technocrats who jumped ship in the wake of the rigged-election scandal and a number of hip post-modern, highly educated hermetics. The party's basic ideology calls for a melding of scientific and magical principles to create a happier and more prosperous society. The New Centurists are progressives and forward-thinkers who believe that the old Technocratic party failed to push the envelope far enough. As they see it, the UCAS needs to call upon all its technological and magical resources to solve the nation's woes. The party strongly supports small-business initiative, research and development, innovation and education as keys to keeping the UCAS prosperous in the global arena.

The New Century Party's chief spokeswoman is Rozilyn Hernandez, a controversial social scientist and mage who has served as a member of the faculty at Georgetown University for the past fourteen years. Ms. Hernandez's theories on social development, technomagic and progress through innovation have met with acclaim and criticism throughout her career, and many have accused her of being a "guru" to her academic adherents. Despite the vagaries of public opinion, Rozilyn stands by her theory that (meta)humankind can achieve a utopian society through technological and magical development. In the speech announcing her candidacy, Hernandez summed up her opinion in the following words: "Our technology isn't doing enough. Magic isn't doing enough. Neither of them has lived up to what they could be. We need to take back the reins of power and guide the world into a new era. Magic and technology working together can show us the new directions that our nation needs to take; this way, we can fulfill the promise of the twenty-first century."

Dr. Hernandez is also a high-grade initiate of a hermetic magical order known as the Illuminates of the New Dawn, an order that sees the Awakening as a sign of a new era in human development. They believe that the forces of science and magic must be reconciled in order to advance the (meta)human cause. Most members of the ION are also members of the New Century Party. Naturally, conspiracy theorists see this as proof that the New Century Party is being manipulated by some kind of Illuminati-style magical conspiracy behind the scenes.

The New Centurists are ruthlessly pro-evolution, supporting "progress" at almost any cost. They are concerned about preventing environmental damage, but only because they see conservation as the most efficient way for progress to continue. They are likely to sacrifice quite a few individual freedoms in order to achieve their greater goal of prosperity and ongoing techno-magical development in the UCAS.

Vice President: Hernandez's running mate, Ramsay McMullin, is a Technocrat and the "mundane" face of the campaign. A former film star, McMullin got involved in politics in the latter days of his acting career, then became an advocate for Technocratic causes as his film career diminished. He has tremendous stage presence and an excellent speaking voice. He still plays well to the camera, and he has kept his amazing good looks with only minimal help from cosmetic surgery. McMullin has a lot of "star" appeal for the voting public.

Platform: "Our Magical Future"

The New Century Party plays on the theme of magic and technology working in harmony to create a brighter future for everyone, a variation on the "science will save us" notion prevalent in the 1950s. The New Centurists talk as if there is no problem that cannot be overcome by doing lots and lots of research on it and forming committees to study it. Progressive and intellectual, these people are academic armchair politicians with power. They support equal rights for virtually everyone, unlimited funds for research, better education and a general improvement in the average UCAS citizen's understanding of magic.

JAMES BOOTH
Technocratic Party

James Booth is the former vice president of the Steele administration recently removed from office. The rigged 2056 election and the administration's resultant ouster from office crippled President Steele politically, but Booth refused to let his once-promising political career die and is making a comeback bid for the top seat. Most experts consider him a lame-duck candidate, but he may appeal to some traditional-minded voters who are looking for continuity in a bewildering world.

Booth's primary goal is to distance himself from the political scandal that got him removed from office. He would very much like to know how the election results were rigged and by whom. That information might allow him to vindicate himself in the eyes of the public, giving him the necessary boost to put him in the presidential chair.

Vice President: Booth's running mate is Brandon Ekimatsu, a former corporate golden boy with Mitsuhama Computer Technologies. A staunch Technocrat, Ekimatsu is a political moderate. Popular opinion labels him a corporate lapdog and supporter of any "progress" that provides a better business environment for the megacorps.

Platform: "The Status Quo"

Booth is the ultimate middle-of-the-road candidate. He offers nothing new; instead, he is basing his appeal to the voters on ending "this three-ring circus of a campaign" and getting back to business as usual. Being booted out of office gives him a major stigma to overcome, and so he is working hard to pin the entire rigged-election scandal on former President Steele. Booth provides a soothing contrast to the weirdness of all the other candidates; it is only a matter of time before he loses it during a debate or campaign speech and says outright that he thinks everyone else is nuts.

GENERAL FRANKLIN YEATS
Republican

A retired UCAS Army general, Franklin Yeats left military service for the private sector in the early 2040s and has worked since then as a "military advisor" for several corporations. He has also traveled the public-lecture circuit and written several popular books on his experiences in the military during some of the harrowing formative years of the UCAS. Yeats is Colin Powell after he left the Joint Chiefs of Staff—intelligent, reserved, honorable, and popular precisely because he does not seem like a politician.

General Yeats has made Bug City his personal cause célèbre. Chicago is his home town; the General only escaped imprisonment in the Chicago Containment Zone because he happened to be in DeeCee when the whole mess happened. General Yeats has strongly criticized the UCAS government's treatment of the crisis and advocates quick, decisive action to end the deadlock between the UCAS military and the bugs.

Vice President: Yeats' running mate is his longtime friend Anne Penchyk, an ork who served two terms as a UCAS Representative from Wisconsin. Before that, she founded and ran her own marketing consulting business in Milwaukee. She is a savvy spokeswoman for metahuman rights and an economic progressive who maintains that peace and prosperity go hand in hand. As a strong woman, Penchyk is a likely candidate for recruitment by the mantis spirits operating within Bug City. She has deeply buried connections to the Desolation Angels, of which General Yeats and the public know nothing.

Platform: "Rebuild America"

Yeats is a hawk and makes few apologies for it. His platform calls for rebuilding the shattered nation of America, that once-shining star of freedom and liberty. As the first step toward this goal, Yeats supports building the weakened UCAS military back up to strength, thereby also creating more jobs via huge military contracts and expenditures plus increased demand for support personnel. Yeats advocates reunification with California, by force if necessary, and most people believe that he intends to follow up a successful annexation of the California Free State by sending the tanks rolling into the CAS or NAN territory.

KENNETH BRACKHAVEN
Archconservative Party

Brackhaven is a well-to-do Seattle businessman with financial interests and investments in several major companies. He's a multi-billion dollar success story—a man who took all the opportunities life gave him and parlayed them into something worthwhile. He seems to be the embodiment of traditional conservatism: a businessman, family man and upstanding member of the community. His platform calls for a return to the "traditional" values of common-sense management and good old American know-how.

In truth, Brackhaven is a racist with secret ties to the Humanis Policlub. He knows that he cannot openly express many of his more radical racial opinions if he wants to succeed in his quest for public office, so he has become very skilled at hiding the true depths of his bigotry while subtly promoting racism and discrimination within his sphere of influence. High-level movers and shakers within the Humanis Policlub are secretly backing him as "their" man for the presidency.

Brackhaven's platform takes a strong anti-dragon stance early in the campaign. Brackhaven skillfully plays on the public's concern about the possible consequences of a creature not recognizably human becoming the leader of the nation, and tries to counter Dunkelzahn's fantastic visions of a Golden Age with what he calls "a solid dose of reality." Fear of the unknown is Brackhaven's strongest weapon—he raises doubts about the Awakened world in people's minds, asking them "What do we *really* know about all this stuff?" Throughout the campaign, Brackhaven is laying the groundwork for the total separation of Awakened and non-Awakened humanity in the UCAS.

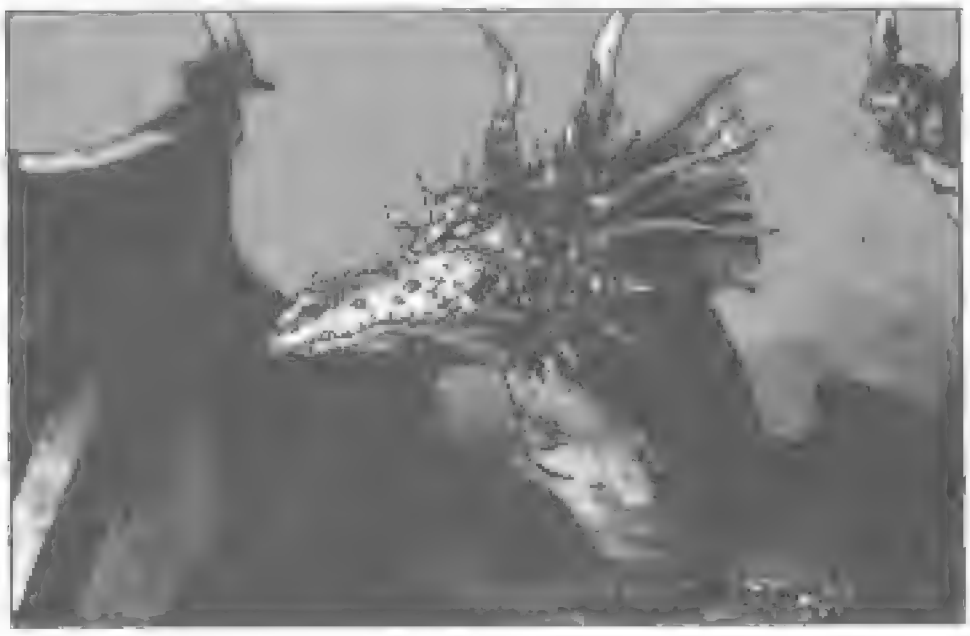
Brackhaven also frequently hearkens back to the "glory days" of the old United States, when the U.S. was a world superpower second to none. He talks about returning to those days, strongly implying (without explicitly saying so) that under his leadership the UCAS will forcibly reclaim a great deal of former U.S. territory, starting with California and possibly not stopping until the old borders of the United States have been restored.

Vice President: William Ager, Brackhaven's running mate, is an even worse scum bucket than his boss (if such a thing is possible). Ager is a radically conservative Republican and former "resources adjuster" for Fuchi America's New York City branch. He built his career as a corporate Mr. Johnson, working behind the scenes on several projects in Fuchi's "black towers" in Manhattan, and he has considerable experience in dealing with the shadows. Ager is strongly anti-metahuman with a special hatred for elves. He and his family were living in Northern California when Tir Tairngire invaded that region, and the Tir forces killed his daughter Clarice. Ever since, Ager has harbored a burning hatred of the Tir and of elves in general. Ager believes that an "elven conspiracy" is secretly manipulating events behind the scenes all over the world, and he will take any steps necessary to stop it.

Several times during his corporate career, Ager arranged for metahumans that he disliked (shadowrunners and corporate executives alike) to meet unfortunate ends. He has enough potential blackmail on those who might threaten him that he feels safe from their opposition, and has consistently used his ties with the Humanis Policlub to strengthen his career and further his goals. Those ties eventually led him to Brackhaven, allowing him to set himself up as Brackhaven's right-hand man. Ager intends to take over the presidency eventually, after multiple terms as VP.

Platform: "A Holy War for the Soul of the Nation"

Brackhaven is raising public opinion against magic, metahumans and all other facets of the Awakening, and calling for a return to "real, traditional values." He has not advocated putting metas in concentration camps (yet), but has essentially promised to purge the UCAS of its metahuman "freaks" and the corruption, depression and political unrest they allegedly cause. Like Adolf Hitler, Brackhaven is a master of inflammatory rhetoric; many people listen and nod their heads when Brackhaven speaks, failing to recognize the genuine evil he represents because they are not the ones who will suffer from his actions.



DUNKELZAHN
Independent

Dunkelzahn is a great Western dragon, at least 7,000 years old and possibly far older. He is the only one of his kind to show real interest in metahumanity. His reasons for entering the political race are best summed up by this quote from the **Aztlan Sourcebook** (p. 84):

—...[THE BIG '12'] Faith, as corrupt as the human hand may have made it, is one of those rare things that lets a person see the world not as a place of random chaos and indiscriminate loss, but one that through the heartache and grief has a purpose beyond the tragedy of the here and now. The decline of faith has stolen hope from the human race ... We, all of us here and others, have striven to weaken the hold of faith on the human heart for generations, so that when magic returned they might be more open to it and embrace it more quickly. I believe we have made a terrible mistake ... Their loss of faith has let them see the world as a cold place built on manipulable formulae and devoid of meaning. They are no longer afraid of the universe.

Dunkelzahn feels a certain responsibility toward his fellow creatures, but has been continually frustrated in his efforts to enlighten and educate metahumanity by his fellow immortals. They prefer to keep the masses in ignorance of the truth while guiding them toward fulfillment of their own purposes. Dunkelzahn has been closely involved in the struggles of many mortals, felt first-hand (telepathically) their hopes, dreams and fears, seen their heights and depths. He has a somewhat romantic view of the human struggle and empathizes a great deal with the plight of mortals in the Sixth World.

The events and omens of the past few years have deeply disturbed Dunkelzahn. He feels that humanity has stumbled into matters involving the Awakened world that they are simply not prepared to deal with yet. Many events are happening much too soon, and the thought that powers like Aztechnology's blood magic may be accelerating whatever is to come worries the wyrm a great deal. Dunkelzahn can no longer stand idly by and watch events unfold; he must take action.

Unfortunately, Dunkelzahn is handcuffed by his fellow immortals, and so cannot reveal most of what he knows to the population at large. (They would probably ignore it anyway; most people in 2057 have trouble paying attention to a 30-second sound bite, much less considering events centuries down the road.) He decides, therefore, to take actions that will benefit all of (meta)humanity whether they know it or not. The dragon sees himself as something of a benevolent dictator, someone who must take certain high-handed measures because he knows more than everyone else. He would rather educate and inform people so that they can act on their own behalf, but if that is not an option, he will gladly do what needs to be done all by himself.

Vice President: In need of a "human" face to put on his campaign, Dunkelzahn turns to master manipulator Damien Knight, the dragon's sometime advisor on metahumanity. Knight proposes Boston-area investor and multi-millionaire Kyle Haeffner, an old friend of Knight's. Haeffner's wife Alice was one of the young "data mavericks" recruited by Echo Mirage to deal with the Crash Virus more than twenty-five years ago, and was also one of the first deckers killed by the virus in cybercombat. Kyle Haeffner has since remarried and thrown himself entirely into aiding important charitable institutions with his considerable fortune (sort of a modern-day Dale Carnegie). Haeffner and Knight are linked by their common background, and Knight feels Haeffner has the skills to make the perfect VP for the great dragon. Knight also knows that Haeffner will be loyal to him first and the wyrm second, exactly the state of affairs he wants.

Platform: "A New Golden Age"

Oddly enough, Dunkelzahn's campaign does not turn on the dragon's exotic, fantastical nature. Instead, the dragon proposes to remind the UCAS of what made it great in the past—Canadian–American ingenuity, and the ability to believe in and act according to an ideal—and to help all citizens share in that greatness. Dunkelzahn points out that it is still the ordinary people of the UCAS who pursue successful technological innovations; the megacorps obey the bottom line too slavishly to accept the necessary financial risks inherent in true inventiveness. The wyrm also plans to encourage all metahumans to rejoin UCAS society by offering one-time amnesty to all those without SIN numbers, creating an opportunity that will allow every male, female and child to register with the UCAS government without fear of reprisal.

STRANGE BEDFELLOWS: A PROLOGUE

In the shadows, it didn't pay to trust a man who smiled too much. Especially if he was a politician and his smiling puss was looking at you from posters and placards mounted on every flat surface available.

"Kinda spooky," Raze said, looking around the room and hefting his HK as if it weighed nothing.

Spook grunted, his attention focused on cracking the lock that kept intruders like him out of the building's system. He almost had it, just a minute more.

"Someone's coming," Riff said quietly. He and Raze moved immediately toward the door while Spook kept working on the files. *Dammit*, he thought, *just a few more minutes.*

Raze flattened himself against the side of the door and glanced over at Riff, who looked as calm and composed as ever. "Whaddya got?" he asked the mage.

"A couple of life signs—say three or four—moving in from the south side."

"Lone Star?"

"That's what I'm going to find out."

With a mumbled phrase and a wave of his hands, Riff's eyes flickered closed. He stabbed one hand out and his perceptions rushed through the cold, dead walls of the building to where he had sensed the intruders. Raze silently kept watch while Riff scanned and Spook kept on working.

"Got it!" the decker whispered. "The files are online. I'll start downloading." The quiet click of keys punctuated his words as he started copying files onto his deck.

"Trouble," Riff said as he opened his eyes. "Whoever they are, they've got a mage. He almost saw me."

"Who are they?" Raze asked, trying to keep his expression neutral as he looked at Riff. He didn't trust magic. He preferred things you could see and touch.

The mage gave him a look that said he thought the razorboy was a moron, and shook his head. "Can't say for sure. I only got a glance. But they're on the way up. How long, Spook?"

"Almost done," said the decker, then cut Riff off before he could comment. "You can't make this kind of stuff happen any faster, chum. About 90 seconds."

Riff turned back to Raze. "Wiz. Let's get ready to clear out of here."

Spook looked at the other two runners and nodded. The mage and the samurai strode over to the door and waited while Raze used his cyberears to listen for trouble outside. He nodded and they turned into the next room, covering both sides. As they moved across the room, Raze waved his hand downward and ducked behind an office desk so quickly that he seemed to have vanished into thin air. Riff and Spook dove for their own cover as two figures entered the room from the far door. One of them spotted Riff as he dodged behind a desk; a shot shredded synthwood along one corner. The other cursed and muttered something to his companion

about not firing like a madman. Riff swore silently, knowing they were flagged. He readied a spell and glanced over toward where Raze was concealed. This move would take some timing, but he trusted the samurai to sense the right moment to act.

As the two new arrivals cautiously approached, Raze fished something out of his belt pack. As the one in the lead started to say, "All right, come out of there," Raze tossed a small, silvery shape into the air. It arced over the desk and landed neatly between them.

"Grena—" yelled one of the gunboys, his shout cut off by a loud bang and a flash that lit up the room brighter than day.

In the split second after the flash-bang went off, Riff popped up from behind cover and threw his spell. A faint shimmer rippled the air between him and the razorboys, then seemed to explode in the air around them like a stone striking a pond. A ripple spread out, then rebounded back to its center. Both gunboys stumbled backward and dropped to the floor as if they had been struck. *Two down,* Riff thought. *But where's the mage?*

A click sounded behind him, and Riff froze at the feel of cold metal pressed against his neck. Raze spun toward the new threat, but too late. The person behind Riff made a tsking sound.

"Don't even think it," she said, her voice deep and throaty. "I don't think your wires are fast enough to stop me from taking his head off."

"What makes you think I care one way or another?" Raze said. Riff immediately regretted being short with the razorboy earlier.

The woman with the gun tsked again. "If you didn't you'd have done me the moment you turned around." Raze lowered his gun a bit, scowling. Riff wondered whether Raze cared about him personally, or about the difficulties of running without a mage.

"You don't think you're going to get out of here alive, do you?" Spook said from over by the door. Riff could almost hear his captor smile in reply.

"I certainly intend to," she purred. Riff felt a faint ripple in the astral, but didn't dare call out a warning. If he tried, he'd be dead in a heartbeat. He concentrated on Raze, focused on wrapping some of his magic around the razorboy to protect him from whatever this enemy mage might do. The ripple in the air became a wave of heat, and a ball of fire sprang into being near the woman's shoulder. The fire coalesced into a red lizard at least two meters long from tip to tail, surrounded by an aura of flames. The creature flicked out a black tongue and hovered near the mage.

"Now," she said, pressing the gun harder against Riff's bare neck, "tell me why you're here."

Riff glanced at Raze, who returned the look for a microsecond. Then he looked over at Spook, who was staring in horrified fascination at the hovering fire elemental. The heat radiating off of the thing was starting to make Riff sweat buckets, but the lady mage seemed as cool and calm as a summer breeze.

"Stealing data from some flies," Raze said. "You want a copy, we can trade … " he trailed off as the woman laughed. Riff shivered.

"Data? Is that all? If that's all you want—" She stopped speaking as a small form materialized next to her head. It looked like miniature cartoon dragon.

"Boss, look out!" the little creature chittered, just as three men in Lone Star uniforms burst into the room. Riff turned his head to see the Starboys just as the lead man shouted "Freeze!" and they leveled their guns in his direction.

Even as Riff was still taking in the sight, Raze was moving. He swung his HK up and put a burst each into two of the cops. The first badge crumpled under the impact, falling backward with what must have been a couple of broken ribs through his armor. The second cop, an ork, was tougher and faster. He took the shot against his armor and rolled with the force of it, simultaneously bringing his gun up to take a shot at Raze. The weapon's laser sight cut a faint red beam through the dimness, but Raze blurred sideways and the shot blew a hole in the wall instead. The samurai hit the floor in a roll and came up behind a desk. The HK coughed again, and this time the ork went down with a thud.

As the third cop drew a bead on Riff and his captor, the fire elemental lunged forward with quicksilver speed. It dissolved, then coalesced around the cop in a cloud of flames. He screamed as his clothing and hair ignited, then fell to the floor writhing in pain. The flames leaped off him and re-formed into the red lizard. Its cold, black reptile eyes watched the cop burn with neither remorse nor passion.

"Truce?" the lady mage said. Raze had her covered with his smartgun, but she didn't flinch from the glare of its laser sight. "I helped you against the Star."

"Politics makes strange bedfellows," Raze said in a tone as flat and dead as the elemental's eyes.

"I'm just here to burn this place," said the lady mage. "My Johnson doesn't care drek about data. You've got what you want—if you let me do what I'm here for, there'll be nothing left to prove that you stole a fragging thing. Kill me now, and you may still have to fight him." She indicated the hovering elemental with a nod of her head.

"We don't have much time, guys," Spook broke in. "The Star must have backup on the way."

Raze nodded, inclining his head a few millimeters. "Okay," he said. "Let him go."

The gun shifted away from Riff's neck. He did his best to rise from his crouch with dignity and back away from the lady mage. Raze, Riff and Spook walked carefully toward the door, Raze and Riff covering their retreat with gun and spell at the ready. The lady mage and her elemental watched them go, their cold, flat eyes reflecting the flickering red of the flames.

As the three runners reached the door, the lady mage whispered something to the spirit. Ribbons of fire shot out from its aura, igniting spots around the room. The runners took off as the smiling face on the posters and placards withered and blackened in the searing heat. The woman's laugh followed them, rising above the roar of the flames.

They hit the alley running and hauled hoop toward their wheels. With a fire elemental loose in the building, there was no telling if the timers they'd set for the charges would stay on schedule. The runners were twenty or thirty meters from the building when a dull roar blew out several windows, sending flames and shards of glassplex shooting in all directions, followed by more muffled explosions that sent several floors of the building crashing down. *You aren't the only one who knows enough to destroy the evidence, lady,* Riff thought.

The runners mounted their stashed bikes, then looked back at the tower of flame that had once been Kenneth Brackhaven's presidential campaign headquarters. As they fired up the bikes, Spook chuckled.

"Now *that's* what I call a political statement," he said, and Raze laughed as the three of them roared off into the night.

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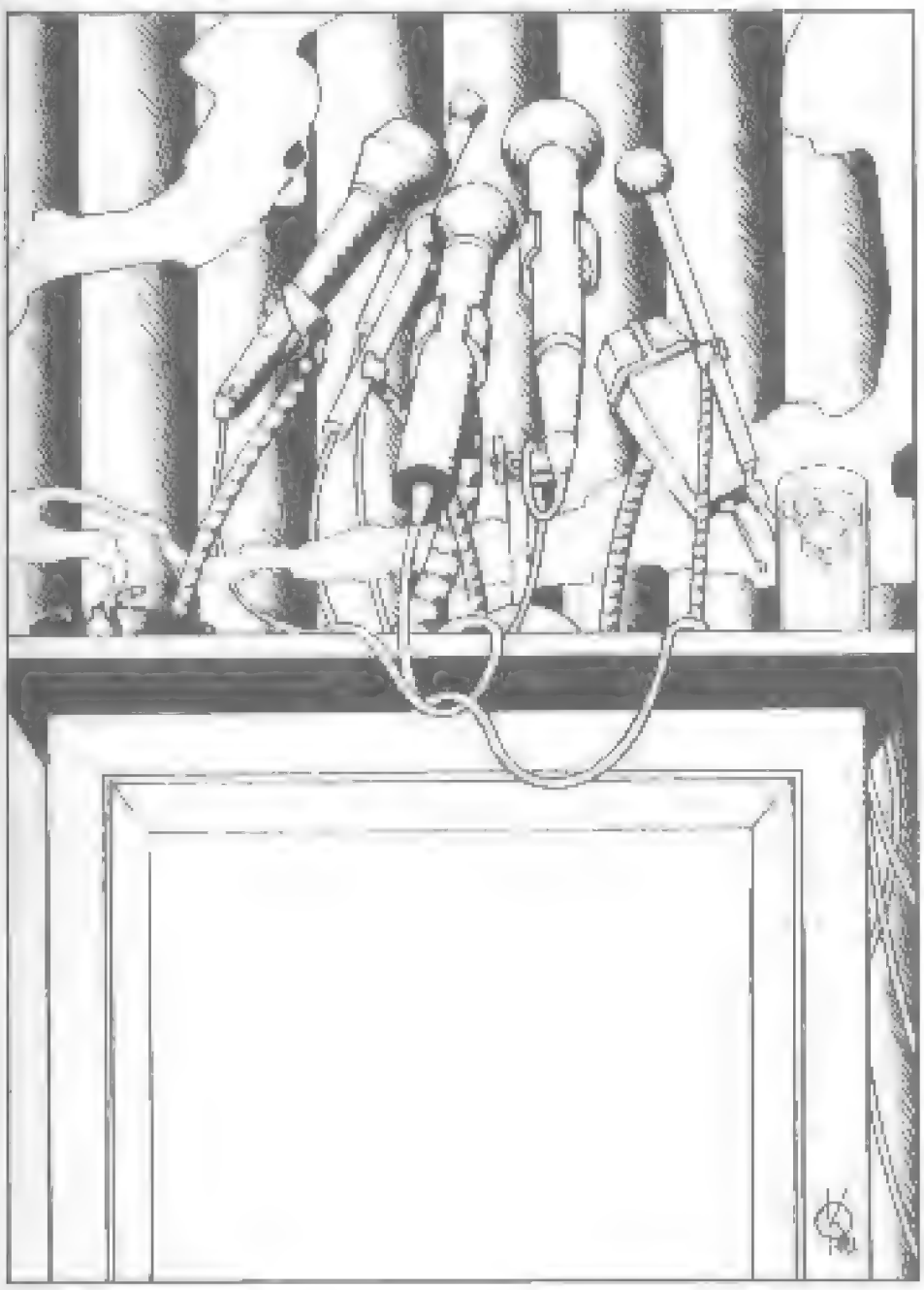

HOST: TOM MACMILLAN
JOINED BY: MARIA CHEN, MATT CHRISTOPHER, CAROLYN AGASI AND ALVIN WATERS

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ANNOUNCER: From Atlanta, the nation's Capitol, "The Macmillan Group," an unrehearsed program, presenting inside opinions and forecasts on major issues. Sponsored by Fuchi Corporation. Fuchi—for all of your life's needs, we provide.

MR. MACMILLAN: Issue two: the road to the White House. The new UCAS presidential race is off and running, but it's still too close to call as the candidates jockey for position in the hearts and minds of UCAS voters. Six candidates have come to the fore as front runners and are racing neck and neck toward Pennsylvania Avenue. They are former Vice President James Booth, former UCAS Army General Franklin Yeats, Dr. Rozilyn Hernandez, ecological attorney Arthur Vogel, Seattle businessman Kenneth Brackhaven, and none other than the great dragon Dunkelzahn himself. What to make of this mess? I ask you, Maria.

MS. CHEN: I think the fragmentation of the UCAS political scene means that the most successful candidate will be the one who manages to build a strong coalition between several factions. Everyone is looking for the broad-based appeal that can bring different people together in support. I think the people of the UCAS are really calling out for change with this election.

MR. MACMILLAN: How big a change are we talking? Big enough to get the dragon elected?

MS. CHEN: I don't think so. I—

MR. WATERS: I think Maria underestimates Dunkelzahn's popularity in this race, Tom. The dragon is drawing a lot of attention from the media, and he's playing the whole political game very well.

MS. CHEN: Yes, but will that popularity translate into votes at election time? I don't think so.

MR. WATERS: I agree that the UCAS is looking for real change, and Dunkelzahn might just be it.

MR. CHRISTOPHER: UCAS citizens aren't looking for radical change. They've had quite enough of that for about the past fifty years. Now they want a stable place to stand when it seems like their country is falling apart. The election scandal was just the final straw in a long series of bad breaks for the UCAS, and I think things have reached a critical point. People are scared; they're looking for some way to get back to the safe, traditional values that their grandparents knew.

MR. MACMILLAN: Do you see anti-Awakened feeling in this, Matt?

MR. CHRISTOPHER: Hints of that, sure. There's still a lot of public concern about and distrust of the Awakened, which means the so-called "normal" candidates like Yeats and Brackhaven have the best chance to draw the majority of voters. If they play their cards right, that is.

MR. WATERS: Don't overlook the power of the Awakened vote, Matt.

MR. CHRISTOPHER: I'm not overlooking it, I'm just saying that it's too marginal to make much of a difference.

MS. CHEN: I'd hardly call millions of metahumans "marginal."

MR. CHRISTOPHER: I don't think you can break it down that way.

MS. CHEN: How else would you? The metahuman vote—

MS. CHRISTOPHER: Is marginal at best. C'mon, Maria, let's step back to reality here! The metahuman population of the UCAS amounts to less than a third of the entire country, and a lot of them aren't even registered voters. I don't think any candidate can win based on a pro-metahuman or Awakened platform. It's too narrow. The winning candidate has to appeal to the average citizen, which means the average human.

MR. MACMILLAN: All right. On the one side of the Awakened fence we have Yeats, Brackhaven and Booth. On the other side we have Dunkelzahn, Hernandez and Vogel. Who has the best chance of successfully straddling the fence? Carolyn.

MS. AGASI: I think Yeats will come out as the candidate of choice. His sterling career with the UCAS Army gives him a lot of appeal, and he's already picked up a lot of popular support. He's pro-metahuman enough to capture the meta vote as a compromise candidate, especially with Anne Penchyk as his running mate—

MR. WATERS: And with Kenneth Brackhaven on the other side of him. Plenty of metahumans will probably vote for any likely winner just to keep Brackhaven from taking the prize.

MS. AGASI: At the same time, Yeats is cautious about metahumans and magic—cautious enough not to alienate the average human voter who may feel a bit ... intimidated ... by the Awakened faces.

MS. CHEN: I disagree. Yeats is a warmonger; he's threatening to drag his country back into conflict with the other nations of North America. I'm betting on Roz Hernandez and her New Century Party—their message of integration really appeals to voters who are tired of ugly rhetoric and divisiveness. I think they're going to gain a lot of popular support for trying to reconcile both sides of this issue.

MR. CHRISTOPHER: Maria, people don't want the issue reconciled. The UCAS isn't ready to put a mage or a metahuman in the White House—there's still too much public concern over the Awakened and magic, especially after recent events in Chicago. There are just too many unknowns.

MR. MACMILLAN: Matt, who's your best pick?

MR. CHRISTOPHER: I don't think it'll be a compromise candidate at all. I think the average UCAS voter is through with compromise; he's looking to get back into a position of strength. I think people feel a strong desire to put traditional values back in their lives and pull their country out of the quagmire it's been sinking into since 2011. And I think Ken Brackhaven can rally the public behind him because he stands for exactly those values. He's a—

MR. WATERS: No way, Matt! Give up these conservative fantasies! Brackhaven's a racist, for pete's sake!

MR. CHRISTOPHER: —a skilled businessman with a proven track record. He stands for strong, honest values and he's a no-nonsense kind of guy. He's solid and dependable, and I think that'll get noticed once the media smoke clears.

MR. MACMILLAN: Let's take a look at what one of the other candidates has to say about Mr. Brackhaven.

ARTHUR VOGEL (From recording): I respect Mr. Brackhaven's skill and success in the business world, but running a government involves more than an understanding of sound business principles. It takes a feel for the needs of the citizens and the nation, not just the bottom line. It takes a willingness to balance the rights of the minority and the majority so that everybody comes out a little ahead. It takes genuine compassion for the plight of the people ... all people ... which Mr. Brackhaven clearly doesn't have.

MR. MACMILLAN: What does Mr. Vogel's opinion tell you?

MR. CHRISTOPHER: He's scared. He sounds like a whiner.

MR. MACMILLAN: Do you also think—

MR. CHRISTOPHER: Why is he bothering to run?

MR. MACMILLAN: —that we're going to see a primarily a negative campaign?

MS. AGASI: Vogel's making a real mistake in going after Brackhaven on this. A negative campaign just won't win. Too many candidates are running to make any one person the bad guy. Whoever wins has to do it by appealing to voters, not tearing the other guy down. Vogel just doesn't have enough popular appeal to cut it.

MS. CHEN: We're going to have a protracted—

MS. AGASI: His big weakness is his focus on environmental issues.

MR. WATERS: No, that's his strength.

MS. AGASI: He's making a mistake—

MR. WATERS: That's his strength.

MS. AGASI: —by focusing on his pet issues and not looking at the big picture. The people of the UCAS don't care about cleaning up toxic dumps in Podunk or safeguarding some endangered species they've never heard of when they can't bring home enough money to put food on the table and the dollar's value keeps dropping.

MR. WATERS: I'm telling you, the environment is his strength. There's an ideological vacuum for a principled Green candidate, and Vogel can fill it.

MR. CHRISTOPHER: Al, you have to remember, Vogel doesn't need your vote in the election.

MR. WATERS: No, but—

MR. CHRISTOPHER: He needs UCAS votes.

MS. CHEN: The environment is still a strong issue—

MR. WATERS: You want to take this outside, Matt?

MR. MACMILLAN: All right, all right, we've got to move on. James Booth, former Vice President of the UCAS and lame-duck candidate extraordinary. In a press conference following the declaration of new elections in the UCAS, Mr. Booth had this to say to the public.

JAMES BOOTH (From recording): I believe my record of service to our nation speaks for itself, and I invite any other candidate who wishes to debate the real issues of this campaign to join me in a constructive dialogue with our fellow citizens.

MR. MACMILLAN: Is Booth's challenge a winning strategy, or is he just blowing smoke? I ask you, Matt.

MR. CHRISTOPHER: (Snort of laughter) The only candidate poor Booth has a prayer of standing up to on stage is Vogel, and that's only because Booth is taller. I don't think Booth can overcome the stigma of this election scandal in time to make a comeback—not with the other candidates already dividing up the voters between them.

MS. CHEN: For once I agree with Matt. I don't think Booth can get enough support to win, but I do think he can affect things depending on which of the other candidates he pulls support away from.

MR. MACMILLAN: Exit question. Who's the front-runner of the race right now? Matt

MR. CHRISTOPHER: Too close to call, but I think we'll see either Brackhaven or Yeats emerge as a clear front-runner in the next few weeks.

MR. WATERS: Dunkelzahn. The dragon's got the whole world's attention, and he's got the media savvy to keep it. But I think Vogel may give him a run for his money in the coming weeks.

MS. AGASI: Yeats. He has a solid background and enough broad-based appeal to stay ahead.

MS. CHEN: I think Hernandez will pull off a coalition and swing massive support over to the New Century Party. She has the vision that will pull people together.

MR. MACMILLAN: I think they're all competitive, but it's going to be an uphill battle to get the top seat. That's all for today. Bye-bye!

>>>>>(And that's just how they're arguing about it in the CAS, chummers. Closer to home, things are getting even more fun and there's no prospect of it calming down any time soon. The new election is getting to be big news all over the place, so by popular demand I've set up this file full of data on the UCAS presidential brawl game. Yup—the whole thing under one roof. We at Shadowland aim to please.

For those of you who've been living in a cave out in tribal territory for the past several months, you should have heard by now that the 2056 presidential election in the UCAS went down in flames when the FedGov discovered that the results had been rigged. They decided to strip the whole process over again from the top, and the public reaction to the whole mess has spawned dozens of political splinter groups and brought all the policlubbers, wetasses, fringe goons and fanatics out from whatever rocks they were lurking under. Hell, even fragg'n Dunkelzahn has gotten into the act.

So here you'll find the skinny on the half-dozen viable candidates for prez—what they say and (more importantly) what they're not saying. Right off, I'm stating for the record that this file is not a place for political debate—we're not trying to make everyone an informed voter, since most of you SINless slags couldn't vote if you wanted to. Nor is this the place to spout off your half-baked (or overcooked) opinions about Issue X or Candidate Y's parentage. What we want is whatever inside information you readers might have on the back-room deals and behind-the-scenes action. Not only is the election turning out to be a gold mine of opportunity for those of us in the shadows—or at least, those who're paying attention—but whoever wins it can affect whether it'll be feast or famine time in the UCAS shadows long after the dust clears.

Because a lot of the documents I've dug up are so short and so many of them are transcripts of speeches, I've set up most of the files so that comments will appear at the end. Tamper and you answer to me.

As the Chinese curse says, we live in interesting times, children. Post well and often.>>>>>

--Captain Chaos (09:43 22/02-22-57)

ARTHUR VOGEL

PARTY AFFILIATION: DEMOCRAT
"ONE WORLD"

>>>>>[This upload comes from the Vogel campaign's public datanet node; they also print it on a glossy flier and hand it out on street corners. The campaign gurus naturally give ol' Arthur the most positive spin they can, but the facts seem to be in order.]<<<<<

—Captain Chaos (09:23:14/02-15-57)

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

When you look around the world today, the corporations and other fat cats seem to be running everything. Life seems to go the way they want it to—and no one else matters. And they tell us every day, in one way or another, that this is the way things were meant to be. This is their version of the Golden Rule: he who has the gold makes the rules. Anyone who tries to buck the system, they say, will only buy himself bad trouble.

Over the years, many people have challenged these assumptions. Most have fought and lost. But one man has fought and won, time and time again. That man is Arthur Vogel.

Born in Ontario in 2014, Arthur Vogel grew up in the Toronto sprawl and saw first-hand the terrible results of unchecked pollution perpetrated by irresponsible megacorporations. As one of the first dwarfs born in Canada, Vogel also had to cope with a world that saw him as different, strange, even alien. During his formative years, young Arthur Vogel developed a keen sense of empathy with the outsider, the underdog, the disregarded and devalued. He has never forgotten the lessons of his childhood and has spent his entire adult life putting them to good use defending the planet and the ordinary person from the ravages of the rich and powerful.

Arthur Vogel worked his way through law school in the 2030s and went on to become an articulate, impassioned defender of the ecological causes dearest to his heart. Throughout his career he has fought tenaciously for what he calls "eco-consciousness"—the realization that (meta)humanity can only survive if we take care of the ecosystem that surrounds us. Even his critics give him grudging praise as "the environment's courtroom champion." For the past eighteen years he has fought corporate power and won countless victories for the ordinary citizen's right to breathe clean air and drink clean water. He came to believe, however, that his own efforts could never be enough to truly change things—and so in 2052 he founded the One World Association, a Democratic Party affiliate devoted to eco-consciousness and conservation.

In Vogel's own words, the One World Association believes that, "we cannot heal our nation until we have healed the Earth. We cannot make peace with ourselves until we have made peace with our planet. No one is above the laws of nature—not people, not corporations. For centuries we have ignored the ticking of the

ecological doomsday clock as we blunder ever closer to killing our world. We cannot afford to be idle any longer. Now is the time for action!"

Together with his running mate, Eagle shaman Gary Grey, Arthur Vogel is prepared to make a real difference in the way we live our lives—a difference that will ensure a better world for all of us and for our children. But he needs your help to do it. Make your vote count—vote the Vogel/Grey ticket and help us build a UCAS worth living in.

>>>>>You should see Vogel and Grey together at public rallies. Grey's a hoot, and the pair of them work marvelous stemwinding side by side.]<<<<<

—Tin Lizzie (14:32 12/02-16-57)

>>>>>[Gary Grey is even more pro-environment than Vogel. Ever hear this guy talk? Listening to Grey is the vocal equivalent of drowning in dark chocolate. With his deep, resonant tones he can electrify a crowd without half trying. Lately, he's also been playing on the connection between his totem and the symbol of the old United States. He speaks of Eagle and the United Canadian and American States in an almost reverent way: he calls them proud, strong, capable of flying high and never meant to be caged or bound. For Grey, Eagle is an ideal that the UCAS should aspire to, including the bird's respect for the Earth and all of her creatures. The image has pretty powerful appeal.]<<<<<

—Windfall (15:01:35/02-16-57)

>>>>>[People who talk about "natural law" like it was a book laid out for them to read make me real nervous.]<<<<<

—Kitty (16:53:19/02-16-57)

>>>>>I know what you mean. And get that "well-if-you-all-think-I'm-that-wizzer-okay-I-guess-I'll-run-for-president" attitude that Vogel cops. Have a little more false humility, why doncha?)<<<<<

—Digger (20:01:23/02-16-57)

>>>>>[Okay, time to separate the diamonds from the dreck. Vogel's got some good ideas—some of which are long overdue—but I don't think he's gonna win people over with his eco-savior spiel. Most of the people who really care about saving Momma Earth from destruction left the UCAS years ago for NAN territory or Amazonia or some other love-the-Earth country. There isn't enough of an eco vote left in the UCAS to win over.]<<<<<

—Nuyen Nick (18:04:53/02-18-57)

>>>>>[Not so, Nick. The eco-consciousness movement in the UCAS dates all the way back to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and it's got renewed vitality in the 2050s. Not all of us ecological-minded types pulled up stakes. Some of us are still here—and we vote.]<<<<<

—Rainbow Warrior (20:03:19/02-18-57)

>>>>>[Vogel is also smart enough to show people how his ecological policies will benefit them in the big picture: more jobs, new industries and that warm happy feeling that comes from knowing you've personally helped save the Earth from destruction. He's not stupid, and he knows how to get an audience to see things his way. He's done it in front of enough juries, after all.]<<<<<

—Tanner (13:12:01/02-20-57)

>>>>>[Not as many as you'd think. A lot of Vogel's legal successes have occurred behind closed doors. He's settled more than two-thirds of his major cases before they come to a verdict. To me, that indicates hard-hitting negotiation—probably with a lot of leverage to use against an opponent. Clarence Darrow he's not.]<<<<<

—LegalEagle (12:34:02/02-22-57)

>>>>>[Clarence who?]<<<<<

—Sammy Boy (12:40:54/02-22-57)

>>>>>[Don't they teach you kids any history these days?]<<<<<

—LegalEagle (01:01:32/02-22-57)

>>>>>[What about Vogel's running mate? How can he run for UCAS vice pres if he's some kind of NAN shaman?]<<<<<

—Jaxon (19:04:22/02-22-57)

>>>>>[Stick to catching bullets, Jaxon, you dumb slot. Not all shamans are Native American, and not all of 'em live in tribal lands. Grey happens to be quite the all-American boy. From what I've heard about him, he sees Eagle as a proud symbol of the old United States. He talks about his country and his totem in the same kind of reverent tone, along with respecting the land.]<<<<<

—Mistik (02:20:07/02-23-57)

>>>>>[The following e-mailer went out to a huge database of potential supporters, and it gives a pretty clear portrait of what Vogel is really like (or as clear as you're going to get from anything made public during a presidential campaign, anyway). As a tactic, this mass-mailing deal doesn't work much better nowadays than it did back when you had to send dead trees through the post office, but some things never change.]<<<<<

—Captain Chaos (13:04:12/02-4-57)

A LETTER FROM ARTHUR VOGEL

Dear Friend,

Recently, my office has received thousands of calls responding to my talk, "Restoring Natural Law," on NewsNet. I wish to thank everyone for the tremendous outpouring of support. Your calls and messages to the network show that the majority of UCAS citizens are swiftly coming to recognize the truth about what really threatens our way of life.

I believe the coming decades hold great promise and opportunity for the people of the United Canadian and American States. All across the country, people are rising to the challenge of restoring the spirit of our republic. This year's election offers us the opportunity to choose the kind of leadership capable of inspiring us to meet this challenge. Yet as I travel around the country, many people have told me that no one in the current field of candidates is addressing the real issues that

concern them. People whose feelings and views I respect have suggested that I might be a welcome addition to the field. I am no politician, but I know what I believe and I will share those beliefs with you.

The United States of America and the great nation of Canada were founded on the principles of natural law. America's founding fathers believed in certain immutable laws of nature, among them every citizen's right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. They held that as long as citizens and government officials conducted their affairs in accord with natural law, the country would enjoy prosperity and plenty. Citizens functioning in harmony with natural law would naturally behave in ways that respect and uphold each other's right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Law "enforcement" would be practically unnecessary in such a society, and therefore government would remain small and efficient.

In the twenty-first century, we inheritors of our founding fathers' wisdom inhabit a nation in crisis. Rising crime, political corruption, declining education, a seriously deteriorating economy and a devastated environment are among the many enormous problems that confront our nation. The founders' vision of a country whose people live in accord with natural law has become a distant dream.

Somewhere, somehow, we have lost our way. As a nation, we have become disconnected from our roots. We, the people, and our government have lost our connection to the fundamental laws of nature that are so vital to our life, liberty and happiness. I have declared my candidacy for president of the UCAS in the hope that I might help bring the country I love back into harmony with natural law and thereby restore natural rights to every citizen. No one is above the laws of nature, neither people nor corporations. For centuries we have ignored the ticking of the ecological doomsday clock as we blunder ever closer to the death of our world. We cannot be idle any longer. Now is the time for action!

We possess much greater knowledge of natural law than the founders of the United States and Canada ever dreamed existed! Modern science and magic have systematically revealed deeper levels of Nature's mysteries to us. We can see this profound new knowledge of natural law in its practical applications: life-sustaining technologies that offer solutions to many of the problems we face and provide the means for our nation to live in greater harmony with the world around us.

As we probe more deeply into the workings of Nature, we inevitably discover that the many physical laws governing the universe have their ultimate origin in a higher set of laws—in a universal field theory of Nature's intelligence as the basis of all phenomena. Because these higher laws constitute the most fundamental level of natural law, they have been called the "Constitution of the Universe"—the ultimate source of the order and harmony displayed throughout Creation.

Natural law governs our entire, diverse universe with absolute efficiency in accordance with the principle of least action. The extent to which individual life and national life are in harmony with this deepest level of natural law is the extent to which the conduct of human affairs and the administration of the government will be as naturally efficient and free from problems as the government of nature.

If we wish to restore our lost prosperity and security by once again living in harmony with natural law, we must instill in every citizen the most profound understanding of and respect for Nature in all its aspects. To this end, I support public education that combines our most advanced scientific knowledge with new educational strategies in accord with natural principles. Such educational programs, launched in a few regions in recent years, have been shown to increase intelligence, improve academic performance, promote better health and reduce stress. If we expand these programs, as I will do if elected, we can have real hope of solving the problems that plague us.

We can and must have prosperity without ecological devastation. To achieve this, I support more investment in alternative technologies such as sea-farming and gengineering, "clean" energy sources such as fusion and solar energy, smaller-scale and more energy-efficient technologies and magical alternatives to technology. I believe in the efficient use of tax revenue to support companies developing safe, efficient, cutting-edge technologies for the betterment of all UCAS citizens. I also wholeheartedly support greater effort in research and development, as well as cooperation with ecologically developed countries such as Amazonia and the Native American Nations. We still have time to undo the damage that has been done, and companies that wish to help heal the Earth should be able to gain some financial profit from doing so. To reward only those practices that diminish and destroy our precious ecosystem is to seal our own death warrants; we can no longer afford such short-term thinking.

Though politicians in all parties pay lip service to the notion of conserving our irreplaceable environment, many of them have no real concern beyond getting votes on the crucial day. They do not really think about the fate of the world in which we all must live. Unlike many of my competitors in this race, I am not a politician or a celebrity. Throughout my career, I have acted out of a sincere desire to see justice done in accordance with the laws of both Nature and (meta)humanity. I joined the field of presidential candidates out of that same desire, even though my inexperience in the political arena made me hesitate to face difficulties and dangers at which I could only guess.

But I cannot simply dismiss the feelings of those who urged me to enter this campaign. They, and I, know that I will stand for the beliefs I have described. I will stand without apology for the principles of natural law. I will stand for the view that above all, we must restore our fundamental relationship with the natural world. And I will stand against those who accept—and sometimes even advocate—the slow destruction of our heritage through ignorance, incompetence and greed.

I would greatly appreciate any support and encouragement you can extend to our cause.

Sincerely,

Arthur Vogel

POLITICAL POISON: A PROLOGUE

Silver had a talent for getting herself into trouble. Often it turned out to be profitable trouble, so the talent did more good than harm for someone in her line of work. This time, however, Silver was beginning to suspect that the trouble she'd landed in wasn't the good kind.

Cracking into the Hawkshorne storage facility was the easy part. Silver had broken into tougher places more often than she cared to count. The guard barghests were dozing like puppies, sleeping off the drugs in the meat scraps Silver had tossed them. The security system yielded under her skillful touch and the deft use of a passkey she'd stolen from one of the corp's low-level execs earlier in the evening. He wouldn't miss it for awhile—at least not until someone happened by his condo and let him out of the closet.

Now, standing in a room full of featureless metal canisters and cylinders, Silver was having second thoughts about this run. Even through her filter mask, the sharp, chemical stink of the place made her nose wrinkle. The metal racks along the heavy ferrocrete wall held labeled metal canisters containing a lot of the chemical compounds that Hawkshorne had been forbidden to sell in the UCAS. Like any good corp, they stockpiled the forbidden chemicals and found, or created, markets for them elsewhere.

She scanned the stacks of canisters until she found the shelf with the label she was looking for. She gently lifted a canister from the small grouping on the shelf and placed it in her specially lined shoulder bag.

"Hold it right there," barked a voice behind her. Silver didn't have to look to know he had a gun. Anyone who bothered with that line had to have something to back it up. Slowly, Silver lifted her hands to make it clear that they were empty. She carefully turned to face her antagonist, her mind racing to plan out her next move.

A security guard stood nearby, leveling his gun at her. The shoulder patch on his uniform read Wolverine Security—not a bad outfit, but not very high-class, either. The major corps had their own private security forces; small fry like Hawkshorne had to make do with rent-a-cops from security agencies like Wolverine. The security guard looked baby-face young to Silver, like he should be asking someone out to the prom instead of chasing after shadowrunners in basements. *A sure sign you're getting old,* she thought.

"What are you doing in here?" Skippy the Guard said. Silver smiled a bit and kept cool, deliberately not looking at the large, dark bore of the gun. She'd need her wits about her to get out of this in one piece.

"Security inspection, mister, from head office. This place is in pretty sorry shape."

"Don't give me that drek," Skippy said, but Silver heard a note of uncertainty in his voice.

"Listen," Silver said with an exaggerated sigh, "I don't have time for a lot of drek here. Don't make this report worse than it has to be, huh? I don't want to see anyone lose their job over it."

Say the magic word, Silver thought. At the thought of losing his secure, decent-paying job guarding a bunch of tin cans, Skippy's face took on a worried look that told Silver he was thinking about other things than where his gun was pointing.

Silver's right foot came up in a snap kick calculated to break the guard's wrist, but he flinched at the last second and she didn't hit him square. The gun went off as it flew from his hand. Silver followed the first kick with a knee strike that put Skippy's future prom prospects in doubt and finished him off with a right cross.

She left him on the floor of the storeroom and bolted for the exit. Wolverine had to have other people at this site, and the shot must have alerted them. It was well past time for her to be going. She zipped the carry-bag closed and hoofed it.

She was over the fence and away just as the backup showed, cutting it closer than she would have liked. *You're slipping, kiddo,* she thought, *getting soft in your old age.* As the adrenaline high from the fight with Skippy wore off, Silver felt suddenly weak. She stumbled over a crack in the sidewalk; fatigue was really getting to her. *Time to get this thing over with,* she told herself, and headed for the nearest telecomm to arrange the exchange.

As she hoisted the bag to dig out her phone, she saw the rip in its side.

"Oh, drek," she whispered, and carefully unzipped the top. The valve on the slim silver canister was cracked, probably by Skippy's bullet. A small puddle of green fluid had pooled in the bottom of the bag, leaking slowly from the canister. The chemical tang hit Silver like a slap in the face.

Silver's stomach lurched and she fought a wave of dizziness. She'd been exposed to this chemical drek—stuff so nasty that the UCAS government had actually bothered to ban it—and she had no idea what it was. She needed help, and not from the Johnson. She knew nothing about him at all—he might well take the goods off her and leave her sick or dying in the street. She needed to get somewhere safe and call someone she could trust.

Silver clung to the telecomm as a second wave of dizziness washed over her. When it receded, she looked around to get her bearings. The street sign said Seventh and Camden—she had a safe house not too far away. Maybe she could make it there. *Let's see you get out of trouble this time, kiddo,* she said to herself, fishing out her portable phone. *Maybe with a little help from my friends.* With shaky fingers, she started dialing.

INTRODUCTION

In **Political Poison**, a toxic shaman plots to destroy the political career of presidential candidate Arthur Vogel to avenge a grudge dating from the candidate's courtroom days. The shaman is planning a toxic disaster that will kill thousands of people at a major Vogel campaign rally. To accomplish his terrible goal, the shaman hires a friend of the runners to steal a canister full of a deadly chemical. Unfortunately, the canister takes a little damage in the process and begins to leak slowly. The friend, made deathly ill by the chemical, barely makes it home to her squat with the goods before collapsing. Meanwhile, the corporation stockpiling the chemical has hired runners of its own to retrieve the stolen property, and still others in the service of the toxic shaman are attempting to recover it for their master. The player characters are caught in the middle of this crazed scheme of revenge and must decide what do with the poisonous hot potato that Fate has dropped in their hands.

Political Poison is set in Seattle, but the gamemaster may transplant it to any large city in the UCAS as needed to suit his or her campaign.

WHAT GOES AROUND COMES AROUND

During his sterling career as a lawyer for environmental causes, Arthur Vogel has proved uncannily adept at predicting trouble from certain eco-terrorist groups—especially when his legal opponents refuse to accept Vogel's offers to settle cases out of court. In fact, Vogel's "predictions" have nothing to do with prescience or even luck. For years he has operated what amounts to a protection racket, using the threat of eco-terrorism to extract lucrative settlements from his opponents. This scheme has allowed Vogel to build a reputation as a hotshot lawyer able to make the biggest and baddest corporations back down and has led several radical environmental groups to see him as an "undercover champion" of the rights of the Earth.

During one such negotiation several years ago, Vogel sent a cell of TerraFirst! saboteurs to a Hawkshorne Chemical plant in Seattle to disable the plant and end its production of a certain toxic chemical. Somehow Hawkshorne learned about the raid, and its corporate security forces ambushed the saboteurs. The TerraFirst! team destroyed the plant, but all of them and many Hawkshorne security personnel died in a massive explosion. Hawkshorne settled with Vogel out of court, agreeing to pull the chemical off the market. Instead of destroying it, however, they stockpiled the remaining inventory. Vogel considered the case a victory despite the fate of the TerraFirst! cell.

Unknown to Vogel—or anyone else—one member of the TerraFirst! team survived. Alan Riv, a young and idealistic shaman with a powerful hatred for those he called "despoilers of Mother Earth," survived the explosion but was horribly burned from exposure to the toxic chemicals at the site. Cut off from help and fearing that the authorities would hunt him down, Riv fled into the sewer tunnels. In the dank catacombs beneath the metroplex, sick and in terrible pain, the young shaman underwent a psychological transformation that twisted his magical talents toward a toxic path. He became obsessed with revenge against everyone responsible for his friends' deaths and his own disfigurement, including Arthur Vogel. As he slowly recovered his strength, he became more and more powerful. Soon he began to gather followers from the other outcasts and misfits living underground. Through his years of slow and agonizing recovery, one thing sustained him: his plans for revenge against those who had brought this fate upon him.

Riv recently learned of the stockpiled chemical at the abandoned Hawkshorne plant and arranged for the theft of a sizable sample. He finds it fitting that Arthur Vogel should be ruined—possibly killed—by the very same chemical that Riv's TerraFirst! team attempted to stop Hawkshorne from producing and that Vogel fought to have legally banned and destroyed. He plans to use the potent toxin during a political rally for Vogel in the metroplex. The poison will kill almost everyone in attendance, possibly including Vogel, and the investigation of the incident will inevitably expose Vogel's involvement in the whole affair. Should Vogel survive the rally, his political career will swiftly succumb to the burgeoning Hawkshorne scandal.

BAD MEDICINE

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

Driving like a fraggin' madman through one of the rougher sections of the Barrens at this time of night isn't normally your idea of a good time, but when a friend's in trouble, local traffic ordinances don't really matter much. Not that Lone Star bothers to enforce them out here. A blur jumps backward out of the street and onto the sidewalk, shouting curses at you as you race past.

Another half-block of cement scorches away beneath your tires. You dodge around the burning wreck of a sub-compact lying half on the road and half on the sidewalk, then take a hard left onto the street where Silver told you her doss was. She sounded really fragged up on the comm when she called. You hope you've made it in time. Tires scream as you kill the engine. You park, setting the security system by sheer reflex as you leap out of the car and hit the ground running.

You vault up the stairs three at a time to the small, dingy, third-floor apartment. The door's locked, and nobody answers from inside when you shout. No maglock does much to stop you, of course. In short order, you get the door open. You'll worry about making nice with the landlord later.

The inside of the place looks a lot better than the outside (which isn't saying much). You scan the room, taking in the few mismatched pieces of old roach-infested furniture and the bits of hi-tech shadow gear thrown over them. You hear a dull moan from the other side of the ratty couch and move into the room. Silver's lying there, curled up in a ball, looking pale as death and barely breathing. Better think fast, or Silver'll be sleeping on a slab tonight.

HOOKS

This scene offers the runners a powerful motivation to get involved in Riv's machinations. The toxic shaman's plot may cost a friend of one or more player characters her life as the chemical he hired her to steal poisons her. The runners head out to their friend's doss at high speed, hoping against hope to save her life, and find themselves in the middle of a crisis. In the words of many a shadowrunner, "this one's personal." Make the scene hit the runners hard and fast. Make them think quickly on their feet and don't let up the pressure.

If desired, use another NPC from the gamemaster's current campaign in Silver's place. Ideally, the NPC should be a friend of several of the player characters, and also a character the gamemaster won't mind sacrificing if the runners fail in their life-saving efforts. Former player characters, other runners the player characters know or even a favorite fixer or contact all make excellent alternatives. Simply make sure that the NPC could plausibly have come into contact with Riv's poison in some way. The NPC need not actually steal the canister, he or she simply needs to have touched the poison. For example, a friend of the NPCs may have done the actual stealing and given the canister to the NPC for temporary safekeeping; curiosity got the better of the poor slot, and now the NPC is paying for it.

BEHIND THE SCENES

While the player characters are together, perhaps out looking for a night's fun or work (or both), one of them gets a call from a friend—Adrienne "Silver" DuMont. Adrienne is a shadowrunner who's gone on several shadowruns with the player character in the past; on at least one of those runs, Silver saved the whole team with her quick thinking. She sounds terrible on the telecomm, exhausted and in great pain. She barely manages to gasp out the address of her current doss and pleads with the player character to come quickly.

When the runners arrive at the doss, they find Silver curled up in a corner of her beaten-up couch. She is pale and cold, her breathing shallow and ragged. Anyone can see she's in rough shape and will probably die without immediate medical help. Unfortunately, Silver (like most shadowrunners) doesn't have a SIN or access to a service like DocWagon. If the runners want medical treatment for Silver, they will have to find a street doc or healer who can be trusted not to ask questions.

The kicker is, Silver doesn't have much time. She's dying from exposure to a toxin so lethal that it will kill her in a matter of minutes. If the runners try to move her to a street doc or bring a healer to her, she will probably die before they even get her out of the building. To save Silver, the runners have to help her themselves. They only have a couple of options and they have to act fast. If the runners do nothing, Silver dies three minutes after they arrive.

The runners may be able to save Silver's life by using Biotech Skill and a medkit or by successfully casting an Antidote Deadly Toxin spell. A character with Biotech Skill and a medkit must make a successful Biotech (4) Test to correctly diagnose the problem as poisoning; a successful Biotech (8) Test enables the character to concoct an antidote for the poison with the medkit. Keep in mind that the medkit expert system has the equivalent of Rating 3 in Biotech Skill, if none of the runners have that skill.

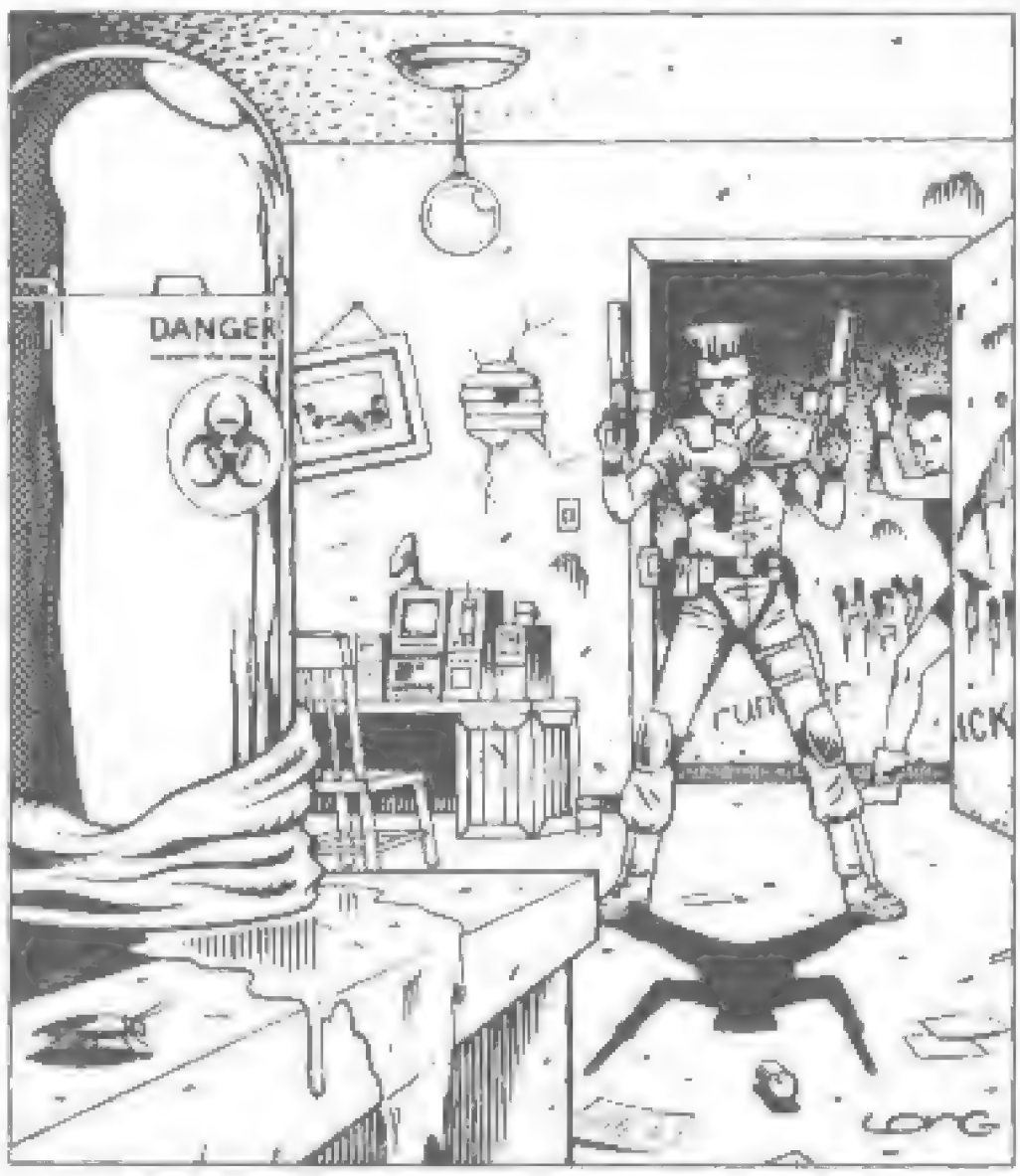
A magician who knows the Antidote Deadly Toxin spell can cast it, making the necessary Spell Success Test against a Target Number of 8. Make a Body Test for Silver using 5 dice against the same target number, minus any successes from the Spell Success Test. If Silver's test yields 2 or more successes, she survives.

SILVER LINING

If Silver lives, she regains consciousness shortly after the poison has been neutralized. She will be weak, but she remains conscious long enough to tell the runners as much as she knows about what's going on.

Silver tells the runners that a Johnson she never worked for before hired her for a snatch-and-grab on a failing Seattle corp by the name of Hawkshorne Chemical. The target was a cylinder of a certain chemical kept in one of the company's secure warehouses. Silver filched the canister easily but nearly got caught by the warehouse's security squad on the way out. She just managed to escape without getting shot.

She then headed off toward the outskirts of the Barrens where she'd agreed to meet the Johnson and exchange the canister for a credstick, but before she got far she started feeling very very sick. She dragged herself to a nearby safe house she knew of, all the while fighting hot and cold flashes and terrible cramps and pain. She just managed to call one of the runners for help before passing out on the couch, which is the last thing she remembers.



The runners can also search Silver's safe house for clues about what happened and should think to do this whether Silver lives or not. They will have a somewhat more difficult time if she dies on them, as she won't be able to tell them anything to help explain any clues they might discover.

Silver's hideout is a typical two-room flophouse, furnished with crates and beat-up junk. The place has no running water or heat. The outside door sports a Rating 2 maglock. The boss also comes equipped with an obviously illegal phone line, which a decker player-character can use. Beyond that, add any other furnishings as you see fit.

Other Discoveries

The canister is wrapped in a heavy canvas bag, which sits on Silver's kitchen counter. The canister is about 15 centimeters long and 10 centimeters wide, with a brushed-silver finish and a valve seal at one end. The seal is slightly damaged from what looks like the impact of a stray bullet. The canister bears no other markings. A dark, greenish liquid is slowly seeping from the cracked seal. Anyone handling the canister with bare hands, or even cloth or leather gloves, risks being exposed to the toxin leaking from it. The canister can be handled safely only with gloves made of non-porous material, such as latex. Characters may also use cyberlimbs or magic to manipulate the canister without physically touching it and exposing themselves to the poison.

If the runners have a sample of the greenish liquid analyzed by a chemist or the like, they discover that it is a potent insecticide that was banned years ago because of its toxic effect on metahumans. Should the runners go digging for more information on the poison, they learn that Hawkshorne Chemical manufactured it until 2048, when it was banned as part of the settlement of a class-action lawsuit brought by Arthur Vogel on behalf of several victims of toxic exposure.

Any character exposed to the poison must make a Body Test against a Target Number of 8. The poison does 8D base damage, and so the player must achieve 2 or more successes to survive exposure. If the player character suffers any damage from the poison, he or she feels hot and cold flashes, chills and severe muscle cramps over a period of about an hour as the toxin runs its course. Any character who fails the Body Test dies at the end of the hour unless they are successfully treated with the one of the methods described as possible ways to save Silver.

The canvas bag also contains a compact datareader and three optical chips. Two of the chips contain guidebook-style information and maps of the metroplex, carefully annotated with references to different back alleys and so forth. The third chip contains specifications for the run Silver was on, including the location of the meet where she is to deliver the canister. The meet site is a drainage ditch on the outskirts of the Redmond Barrens, not too far from the safe house.

DEBUGGING

If the runners fail to search Silver's safe house for clues and the runners seem ready to forget the whole thing and take off, have Fate drop a clue in their laps. Remind them that at least one of them owes Silver his or her life, and that they should at least try to find out what happened to their friend. If the runners are so mercenary that they refuse to get involved in anything unless they are being paid, have Silver's mother contact them later. Silver's mother turns out to be a megacorporate VP interested in hiring the runners to look into her daughter's death for some appropriate fee. If nothing seems likely to entice the player characters into avenging their friend's untimely demise, go to **The Gang's All Here**, p. 25. The attack that occurs in that encounter ought to tip the runners off to the fact that there is something valuable in Silver's safe house.

THE GANG'S ALL HERE

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

After taking a look around the place, you're definitely getting the feeling that Silver got in *waaaayyy* over her head this time. It's going to take some doing to untangle this mess. You're not sure you want this job, but you don't like the thought of turning your back on a friend, either. Tough choice, omae. Better make it soon—preferably over a drink in your favorite quiet night spot—before the drek comes looking for you.

A soft noise from somewhere outside sets the hairs on your neck bristling. As you turn toward the source of the sound, the window overlooking the alley smashes inward with a shower of glass. A small canister rolls across the floor, shooting smoke into the air. Before the canister stops rolling, the door swings wide open and a pair of armed street thugs barrels into the safe house.

The unexpected visitors are a dark-skinned man and an Asian woman, both wearing street gear. The woman holds a gun with a red laser sight that cuts through the smoke-filled air of the flophouse. Scant seconds later, a figure appears in the smashed-open window—an old ork woman wearing a cape of black feathers and holding a gnarled, twisted cane. She hops down from her perch on the windowsill. "Find it," she snaps, and raises her wrinkled hands.

HOOKS

This scene follows hard on the heels of **Bad Medicine**. Give the runners a chance to help Silver and either get her story or look around a bit, then hit them with fast action. This encounter should not be a blood bath, just a device to keep the story moving briskly and introduce the runners to some of the opposition they'll face during the adventure.

BEHIND THE SCENES

The other shadowrunning team should make an attempt to surprise the player characters per normal rules (p. 86, **SRII**). Take into account any precautions that the runners might have taken to safeguard the doss against attack. If the attackers do not gain Surprise over the runners, roll for Initiative normally. Take into account the smoke filling the room and use all applicable vision modifiers (see p. 89 of **SRII** for vision modifiers, or p. 85 of **Fields of Fire** for smoke rules).

The attackers are *another group of shadowrunners, hired by* Hawkshome Chemical to retrieve the canister that Silver stole from them. They have managed to track Silver to the doss and, after quickly scouting out the place, are staging a lightning raid. For the opposing runners' complete descriptions and statistics, see **Cast of Shadows** (p. 32 of **Picking Up the Pieces**). Only Red Lana, Webb and Calleach directly attack Silver's doss. Wheels waits in the team's van outside, ready for a quick getaway.

The team's main goal is to get the canister. If the player characters have found it and placed it out in the open, one of the team (most likely Webb) will try to secure it while the others run interference. Red Lana provides covering fire while Calleach spends 1 turn summoning a Force 6 hearth spirit and commanding it to attack the characters. The spirit attacks by throwing furniture, shards of broken glass and other odds and ends at them. The ork shaman then concentrates on protecting her colleagues and dealing with any magician player characters. If the player characters have not found the canister, Webb or Red Lana will search the doss for it while the other two opposing runners keep the player characters busy.

The other runners are not especially interested in slaughtering the player characters but will kill them without compunction if necessary. The player characters are in the way and must be removed as quickly and easily as possible. If the player characters are willing to give up the canister without a fight, the opposition will take it and leave. However, it is far more likely that the player characters will fight back first and ask questions later.

Keep in mind that if Silver is still alive, she is in no condition to defend herself. Calleach has no qualms about using Silver as a hostage to get what she wants. The runners must try to keep Silver from getting caught in the crossfire—and as Silver is in the middle of the room, that leaves them with very little cover.

DEBUGGING

The opposing shadowrunners will not fight to the death against the player characters. They try to locate the canister as quickly as possible, grab it and get out. If possible, they avoid a protracted fight. If one of the team is killed or disabled, the others retreat, with Calleach using her Raven Form spell to escape if necessary. Calleach will also order the hearth spirit to cover their escape, which it will do to the best of its ability.

If the opposing team manages to escape with the canister, the chemical eventually ends up in Riv's hands. The player characters can continue investigating, possibly going to the meet site and encountering the Reservoir Dogs (**Mad Dogs**, p. 27). If the player characters manage to drive off the other shadow-team and hold on to the poison canister, they must then decide what to do *with it.*

MAD DOGS

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

Even when you try to do a good deed, your luck runs bad. Silver's doss is a wreck; what little furniture she had is bullet-chewed almost beyond recognition, and the burst-in door hangs half off its twisted hinges. You look around as the last traces of smoke drift out the broken window, and something more than the cold air makes you shiver a little. Time to get out of here, chums. You don't want to be sitting ducks, waiting for the next group of headhunters to come calling. Time to find someplace where you can catch your breath and figure out your next move. Time to figure out what in frag is going on and why so many people seem to have this canister full of green drek on their personal Top Ten List of Things To Own. Anything people want that badly has got to be valuable—but how valuable, to whom, and why?

Time to answer those questions, chummers—before you end up dead in the crossfire.

HOOKS

This encounter gives the runners a chance to regroup a bit and figure out their next move, before they jump into another crisis. They are in the middle of a chase involving several parties, all of whom are starting to concentrate their attention on the player characters. Make the runners feel hunted; if they don't come up with some kind of plan to deal with this mess, they're sunk. The Reservoir Dogs' attack should almost come as a relief, because it gives them a straightforward enemy at which to strike.

BEHIND THE SCENES

After the attack on Silver's safehouse, the runners will likely want to find a place to keep their heads down for a little while. If Silver is alive and the runners do not have a hideout of their own, she offers them one of her hidey-holes in Puyallup. The runners may also head to one of their own dosses within city limits.

Not long after the runners reach their new safe house—or on the way, if it lies far from the Barrens—Alan Riv attempts to find the canister using ritual magic and a small sample of the poison. If the runners have the canister, any magician character who assenses it any time in the next couple of hours will notice that it is the target of a sending. If the runners want to do something to counter the ritual, let them, but assume that they will only delay the inevitable; Riv is a talented shaman and tightly focused on his goal. If a magician character wants to try tracing the sending back to its source in astral space, he or she is in for a nasty surprise: Riv has called up several toxic spirits to patrol his domain and deter astral intruders. The runner will make it as far as the shut-down Hawkshorne plant in Redmond before he or she is astrally attacked by two Force 5 toxic earth spirits. Another spirit will arrive 4 rounds after combat begins.

Once the sending is complete and the canister found, Riv sends a powerful toxic spirit and the Reservoir Dogs, a gang of completely crazed go-gangers, to fetch it. If the runners do not have the canister, a group of gangers will come after them anyway; Riv will send some Reservoir Dogs to dispatch the runners and Silver, thereby tying up a potential loose end. Riv will send the toxic spirit to recover the canister from Callieach's team, an assignment the spirit will handle with no problem.

The attack on the safe house occurs late at night, and the Reservoir Dogs outnumber the runners 3 to 2. For example, a team of four player characters will have to deal with six gang members. If the toxic earth spirit turns up as well, it remains in astral space until combat begins. At that point, it manifests and attacks any character standing between it and the canister.

If the runners have posted guards or set up any perimeter or other defenses, the gamemaster should decide how effectively these measures might give the runners warning of the attack and allow them to prepare accordingly. The gang members are cunning but not brilliant, and will not be able to avoid most sophisticated technical alarms or defenses. The toxic spirit will attack any magical defenses that it thinks it has a chance of disabling.

RESERVOIR DOGS SUCCESS TABLE

Successes	Result
1	"We were told to get the canister away from you. Never mind by who."
2	"We work for Riv, Shaman of the Great Earth Mother. He ain't no pretty daisy-eater, he's one tough elf. Bet he kills you slow when he catches up with you. He's leading us to a real future. He's got serious mojo and everybody underground is afraid of him, but he's good to people who do what he wants."
3	"I don't know why Riv wants that canister. He's crazy. He keeps talking about some guy named Vogel—calls him the Poisoner of the Great Mother. Says he's gonna get this Vogel guy good."
4	"Riv's more than crazy, he's fraggin' toxic. He lives with a bunch of fragged-up spirits in the burned-out shell of an old chemical plant in the Barrens." The ganger can give the runners directions to Riv's hideout.

Reservoir Dogs

B	Q	S	I	W	C	E	R	Armor
6 (7)	5 (6)	6 (8)	3	4 (5)	2	5.9	4	5/3

Initiative: 4 + 1D6
Threat/Professional Rating: 3/3
Skills: Armed Combat 4, Firearms 4, Stealth 3, Unarmed Combat 4
Cyberware: Hand Razors, 1 dose of Kamikaze*
Gear: Armor Jacket, Colt America L36 [Light Pistol, 11 (clip), SA, 6L]
*See p. 99, **Shadowtech.** Kamikaze boosts the gangers' Attributes to those listed in parentheses above and allows the gang members to ignore the first 4 boxes of damage they take.

The Reservoir Dogs may consist of any assortment of races that the gamemaster desires. Adjust the above statistics for race as required using the Racial Modifications Table, p. 45, **SRII.** All of the Reservoir Dogs are scarred and/or deformed in some way, even the elf members.

Toxic Earth Spirit

B	Q	S	I	W	C	E	R	Armor
8	3	8	4	4	1	6A	6	6

Initiative: 16 (26) + 1D6
Force: 6
Threat/Professional Rating: 6/4
Attacks: 6 dice, +1 Reach, 6S damage or as listed for powers
Powers: Alienation, Concealment, Corrosive Secretions, Fear, Manifestation, Noxious Breath
Note: The statistics above apply to the spirit's manifest form. In astral form, all of the spirit's statistics are equal to its Force.

As soon as the spirit has the canister, it will flee and leave the gangers to fend for themselves. The spirit takes the poison back to its master at the condemned chemical plant, where Riv prepares the next stage of his plan. If a player character manages to banish or destroy the spirit, Riv senses it immediately and will send a second spirit to steal the canister. He will continue to send toxic earth spirits until he gets what he wants.

If the runners manage to capture one of the Reservoir Dogs alive, they can interrogate him and attempt to learn the information provided in the Reservoir Dogs Success Table. Per standard rules, each number of die roll successes gains the player characters a given piece of information. Rolling a higher number of successes reveals the information listed for lower numbers of successes as well. Questioning a ganger requires a player character to make an Interrogation (5) Test; the high target number reflects the effects of the kamikaze and the ganger's fear of Riv's retribution. At the gamemaster's discretion, the runners can lower the target number if they convince the ganger it is worth his while to cooperate. Even if the ganger mentions Vogel (3 successes or more), he can't provide any further information about the candidate; he has literally been living in a hole and knows nothing about the presidential campaign. The runners, however, should recognize Vogel's name immediately and remember seeing information somewhere about a Vogel campaign rally scheduled to take place in the metroplex within the next 24 hours.

RIV'S LAIR

Riv has been hiding out in the condemned Hawkshorne Chemical plant where his TerraFirst! cell's ill-fated attack took place years ago. The plant is a single, large building—now just a burned-out shell—located in the Puyallup Barrens not far from Hell's Kitchen. The city posted numerous "KEEP OUT" signs on the rusting fence surrounding the plant to indicate that the building was condemned as a hazard by order of the metroplex government. It was slated for demolition years ago, but the city hasn't bothered to spare the time or manpower for the job because the land on which it stands is commercially worthless.

The plant and the area around it constitute a Toxic Domain (p. 101, **Grimoire II**) under Riv's control. At least one toxic earth spirit, identical to the one described above, is always on guard in astral space near the plant. Inside, the plant is a maze of gutted machinery, rusting catwalks and ruined corridors, all charred and soaked with dangerous chemical residues.

If the runners arrive at the plant after their confrontation with the Reservoir Dogs, they find that Riv is already gone. If they search the plant after overcoming its guardian toxic spirit, they discover that Riv turned one of the relatively intact conference rooms into his medicine lodge. Numerous charred bones and skulls decorate this room, along with strange symbols and diagrams smeared in hideous fluorescent paint on the walls, floor and ceiling. One of Arthur Vogel's campaign posters is tacked to a wall and has symbols painted over it. The conference table and

the floor are littered with trash; if the runners move any of the garbage, a few fat roaches scuttle away. Amid the mess on the conference table is a collection of flyers announcing Arthur Vogel's political rally in the metroplex and a crumpled map of the Superdome, where the rally will be held.

Also in the medicine lodge are Riv's "pets:" three hell hounds under the influence of Control Animal spells stored in spell locks sewn into their spiked collars. The hounds are blindly obedient to Riv and will fight to the death to protect his sacred place against intruders. If the runners remove the hounds' collars, the critters become confused and run away (provided, of course, that the player characters take no further hostile action against them). Removing a collar requires a successful unarmed combat attack followed by a Strength or Quickness (6) Test in which the player rolls 2 or more successes.

Hell Hounds

B	Q	S	I	W	C	E	R
4	4 x 4	5	3/4	3	—	6A	6

Initiative: 6 + 3D6
Threat/Professional Rating: 4/4
Attacks: 6 dice, 6M damage or as listed for powers
Powers: Enhanced Senses (Improved Hearing and Smell, Low-Light Vision), Flame Projection, Immunity to Fire
Note: The gamemaster may use the toxic paranormal rules on pp. 148–9 of the **California Free State** sourcebook to make these creatures unique and even more unpredictable.

DEBUGGING

Make the fight with the Reservoir Dogs challenging for the runners, but don't overwhelm them. If the opposition looks too tough, feel free to decrease the number of gang members or the power of the toxic spirit (or eliminate the spirit altogether).

If the characters easily defeat the Reservoir Dogs and keep the toxic spirits at bay, the gamemaster has two options. He can have Riv continue to send toxic spirits and Reservoir Dogs after the player characters until they wear the runners down, or make Riv send the runners a message via a toxic elemental to come to his lair, promising them nuyen for their trouble. If the runners go to the abandoned plant, Riv will attempt to ambush them with toxic spirits, gang members and a few hell hounds (not including the ones in his medicine lodge) as soon as they enter his toxic domain. If the characters drop the canister and leave, Riv stiffs them (of course) and heads out to destroy Vogel. The characters should not face Riv himself until **Toxic Candidate.**

If the runners seem to have hit a dead end, let one of the Reservoir Dogs spill some information in order to save his own hide. If the runners annihilate all of the gangers without questioning one of them, drop them a clue about Riv's plans to attack Vogel's political rally. For example, one of the Dogs may be carrying a flyer about the rally—an odd thing for a sewer rat to be carting around.

If the runners seem reluctant to involve themselves further, remind them that a lot of people may die if Riv goes through with his plan. If necessary, feel free to arrange for a friend or two of the runners to attend the rally in support of Vogel's campaign. You can also remind reluctant runners that they can either save the day or risk being considered accessories to thousands of deaths when Lone Star starts investigating and discovers their involvement.

If the runners completely lack any semblance of a conscience and seem unconcerned by the deaths of thousands of people, they should at least consider that Riv might still want to tie up his own loose ends by taking them out unless they stop him first.

TOXIC CANDIDATE

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

Vogel's rally at the Superdome has brought every political nutcase in the plex out of the woodwork, along with a lot of curious folks here to watch the show. Thousands of people are packing themselves into the stadium like sheep milling in a pen, while salivating news crews from all the major nets bounce around like headless chickens, setting up satellite relay vans and cameras to capture the event and beam it into millions of households. Plenty of metahumans have turned out in support of "their" candidate, and supporters of rival candidates are lining up throughout the arena to hold up signs and chant slogans for their own favorites. A small knot of Brackhaven supporters shout insults at the metahumans making their way into the stadium, while Lone Star cops cordon off the area and try to keep the crowd from turning into a mob. All the Star officers are packing ultra-heavy weapons and carrying riot gear—looks like they're expecting trouble. Little do they know just how bad the trouble might get.

Somewhere in this crowd of thousands is a toxic shaman armed with deadly poison that can wipe out all these people, and you're the only ones who know he's here.

HOOKS

This is the climatic confrontation scene with the toxic shaman. Go to town on this one: play out dramatic struggles with toxic spirits while Riv chants like a madman, crawls the walls and hurls spells at the runners from the darkened catwalks. Make this scene exciting and explosive.

BEHIND THE SCENES

Before the runners can do anything to stop the toxic shaman, they face two challenges: getting inside the Superdome and finding Riv.

GETTING IN

Security around the Superdome is nowhere near airtight, but several dozen Lone Star officers in riot gear are working crowd control and security. Runners carrying weapons in an obvious fashion—rifles slung over their shoulders, ammunition practically spilling from every pocket—will be stopped and turned back. With a crowd this huge, however, the Star doesn't have time to do more than a cursory search of everyone entering the stadium, and so they're relying on a visual check rather than the usual, more thorough, physical pat-down. As each runner enters the stadium, make a Perception Test using 4 dice against the Concealability of that runner's illegal equipment. If an officer spots anything, the runner is told that he or she cannot enter the stadium and is physically turned away. If the runner returns again, the Star gives him or her a closer examination. Make another Perception Test to spot any concealed weapons, subtracting 2 from the officer's target number.

If the runners try to sneak past Lone Star, each of them must make an opposed Stealth Test against the officers' Intelligence (Target Number 4). Each runner whose test is successful can make it unseen to one of the Superdome's side loading-bay areas and try to get into the stadium from there. The side doors are closed and sealed with Rating 4 maglocks. Opening the maglock requires a successful Electronics Test; failure alerts the Secret Service agent on duty in the central security room to the attempted break-in, and several Federal agents will arrive to investigate in 3D6 turns. Use the **Bodyguard** archetype, p. 49, **SRII.**

FINDING RIV

Once the runners are inside the Superdome, they must track down Riv amid a huge crowd of people. Using his gecko crawl spell and other abilities, Riv has made his way up into the maze of support beams and rafters high above the floor of the arena and plans to release a cloud of his deadly poison on the crowd. Any runner who thinks to look up while searching for Riv should make a Perception Test against Riv's Stealth Attribute of 6. If the test is successful, the runner catches a glimpse of movement up in the rafters.

In order to get to the rafters above the stadium without the use of magic, the player characters must reach one of the maintenance stairwells located throughout the dome. The doors to these stairwells all have Rating 4 maglocks that require a special passcard to open. As described under **Getting In**, player characters may try to pick the maglock by making an Electronics Test. A failed attempt will trigger an alert, bringing several Secret Service agents to investigate, with Lone Star not far behind.

The rafters are narrow beams of light metal, most only a half-meter wide, with a Barrier Rating of 10. Three maintenance catwalks cross the upper level of the dome. One runs down the center of the arena's long axis; the other two run perpendicular to the first, placed to divide the dome into thirds. These catwalks are slightly more than a meter wide, made of a metal grid, and have hand rails a meter-and-a-half high running along each side. Each one-meter-square section has a Barrier Rating of 12.

Walking along one of the beams requires the character to make a successful Athletics (4) Test, or a Quickness (6) Test for a player character without Athletics Skill, each combat round. If the test fails, the character loses his footing and must make another Athletics or Quickness test to avoid falling. A character who rolls 1 success on this second test manages to grab onto the beam at the last minute and hang from it. A character who rolls 2 or 3 successes falls flat on the beam. Four or more successes allow the character to regain his or her balance.

A fall from the dizzying height of the Superdome ceiling is almost instantly fatal, as a plummeting character will take somewhere in the neighborhood of 30D damage (and will probably injure or kill a few bystanders below as well). If a runner falls from the rafters, he or she is dead, and so are a handful of people the runner lands on. To determine the collateral damage, roll 1D6; the result is the number of people injured or killed. The runners had better be careful, neh?

Because Riv is using his gecko crawl spell, he has no concern about falling. He can move at his normal movement rate across the beams, catwalks and even the walls and roof of the dome without penalty. In confronting the runners, he will use this ability to his advantage. Any player-character mage or shaman with the same spell or others like it—such as Catfall, Levitate, or air elemental abilities—has a shot at keeping up with Riv.

FINAL CONFRONTATION

When the runners find Riv, he has just crawled to the end of one of the beams and attached the canister of poison to it with a time-release mechanism set to spray a deadly cloud over the floor of the Superdome in two minutes (12 Combat Turns). The runners have that long to stop the toxic shaman and disable the release mechanism, or a lot of people are going to die.

Riv will fight to the death to keep the runners away from the canister. He has also brought help with him; two Force 5 toxic spirits, one an earth spirit and one water, wait for his commands in astral space. The spirits manifest on the shaman's command and attack the runners. As a fighting tactic, the spirits will use their corrosive secretions power to burn through a beam or section of catwalk on which the runners are standing, in hopes of sending the runners plunging to their deaths. As long as Riv and his spirits remain able to fight, the runners have almost no chance of reaching the canister.

Luckily for the runners (maybe), the first signs of combat near the roof will draw the attention of security officers at the dome. After the first gunshot or spectacular spell (or falling runner), a Lone Star squad will arrive in 6 Combat Turns and will try to subdue Riv and the runners. If the shadowrunners convince the Star that they are trying to defuse a bomb, the officer in charge of the squad will let them try. Use any Etiquette Test the gamemaster deems appropriate; alternatively, the Lone Star officer may just accept at face value a statement like, "look, he's shooting at us too" or, "I can defuse the bomb."

Once Riv and his spirits have been dealt with, a runner with Electronics Skill can attempt to disarm the release mechanism on the canister. Crudely jury-rigged, it can be disarmed safely if the player in question rolls a total of 6 successes on an Electronics (6) Test. The runner may make additional tests after the first to get the needed successes, one test per Combat Turn.

DEBUGGING

Give the runners a fair shot at stopping Riv before he can release the poison. Make the scene tense and explosive, and give the characters their chance at glory before you call in Lone Star or the Secret Service to help them out.

The gamemaster should make all Perception Tests to spot Riv secretly. If things are going badly for the runners, the gamemaster can give them a lucky break and have one of them spot the shaman in the rafters rather than making the players puzzle it out. Do this only if it looks like the runners are not going to find Riv on their own.

If the fight against the shaman looks too difficult for the runners, reduce the power of Riv's toxic spirits or eliminate them. If the runners look likely to walk all over Riv, give him an additional spirit and increase the Force of all the toxic spirits as needed to make things challenging. Play Riv as a wily but deranged opponent willing to martyr himself for his revenge.

IF THE RUNNERS FAIL

If the runners fail to stop Riv or cannot disarm the poison bomb, the gamemaster has two options: pull a last-minute save out of his hat or let the chips fall where they may. If the runners are given every opportunity and still fail, we recommend that the poison be released and the runners be forced to deal with the aftermath when thousands of people in the Superdome are killed. Certainly, Lone Star will want to arrest them and find out just how deeply they were involved in the disaster. What actually happens next, however, is up to the gamemaster. The runners might escape and become hunted fugitives, or they might try to prove their innocence. They may even get some help from Arthur Vogel in the effort to clear their names (assume that Vogel survives the poison-gas attack).

If the gamemaster is feeling merciful or simply does not want to deal with a messy aftermath, help can arrive in the form of Calleach's team of runners. These four NPCs, having figured out at some point just what this madman plans to do with the canister that Hawkshorne hired them to recover, have chosen to try to take down Riv and prevent the release of the toxin themselves. With his mechanical expertise, Wheels can help disarm the canister. If necessary, Finally, Lone Star and the Secret Service can also serve as aces up the gamemaster's sleeve.

PICKING UP THE PIECES

If the runners defeat Alan Riv and prevent the release of the poison in the Superdome, they will likely be taken into custody by Lone Star or the UCAS government. In either case, Arthur Vogel will raise a groundswell of political protest, calling the runners "heroes for the environment" and "political prisoners." He will not, however, directly pull strings to get them released; he does not have that kind of power. Political PR is likely to work in the runners' favor, earning them their freedom within a few days of the rally. They will be media darlings for about 15 minutes before some other newsworthy event comes along; then they will be forgotten, at least by the media hounds.

A day or two after being released from jail, the runners will receive a message from Arthur Vogel expressing his gratitude to them. Vogel will be good for one future favor for the shadowrunners (potentially *very* useful, should he end up becoming president of the UCAS). TerraFirst! will also likely contact the runners, as will nearly every other environmental terrorist organization. Lone Star and the UCAS government will keep close tabs on the runners for quite some time to come—it's an election year, after all, and the race includes a dragon candidate. Anything could happen.

If the player characters manage to get away clean from the Superdome, the media will report an attempted assassination against Vogel that was dealt with by the authorities, and the incident will be hushed up. If, while fighting Riv, the runners managed to convince Lone Star they are the good guys, Lone Star will hold them for a few days until the furor dies down, and then release them.

If the player characters fail to prevent the poison from being released, they will learn later that Vogel never made it to the Superdome. In a press conference a day or two later, Vogel reveals that he has been marked for death by certain corporations. He states, "They want to silence the voice of the only candidate willing to fight for the people and our Mother Earth. These poison-spewing corporations care nothing for the men, women and animals they use to produce their goods. They will continue on as if what happened to the poor people trapped in the Superdome is nothing." He vows to keep on fighting the good fight and continue his campaign to become president. The Superdome massacre will become a political rallying point for Vogel's campaign.

Finally, if the runners fail to stop Riv and fail to convince Lone Star or the Secret Service that they are the good guys, the public will demand their deaths for the crime it believes they committed. Leading the charge will be Arthur Vogel. If the player characters manage to escape from the Superdome or from custody, they had better run far away. No one will want to work with them, and several organizations will put a price on their heads.

AWARDING KARMA

Award team Karma for the adventure as described below. Award individual Karma per standard rules (p. 199, **SRII**).

Survival	1 point
Threat	1 point
Preventing the release of the poison	2 points
Defeating Alan Riv	1 point

LEGWORK

After the runners find themselves hip-deep in Riv's plot to acquire the canister of poison, they will most likely want to ask around about why everyone seems so interested in Silver and her little prize. This section provides the information the runners are likely to get from their contacts and investigations.

THE CANISTER

Appropriate Contacts (Target Number 4)

Street Doc, Scientist, Chemist or another contact familiar with chemicals, such as an appropriate Corporate contact

Successes	Results
1	"What you have here is a powerful pesticide. Nasty stuff. The problem with it is, it's toxic to most forms of life—not just the ones you might want dead."
2	"Some outfit called Hawkshorne Chemical made a pesticide like this years ago, but they discontinued it. You can see why."
3	"Hawkshorne had trouble with TerraFirst! right around the time they discontinued making this drek. Bunch of crazy fraggers went on a kamikaze mission—blew up the plant where Hawkshorne cranked this stuff out, poisoned the land it was built on for a long time to come."
4	"That halfer Vogel who's running for president was the guy who got this stuff banned in the UCAS, as a matter of fact. He brought a big suit against Hawkshorne and actually managed to win one over the corp. Pretty impressive, if you ask me."

HAWKSHORNE CHEMICAL

Appropriate Contacts (Target Number 4)

Any Corporate or Environmental contact.

Successes	Results
1	"Hawkshorne's a lame corp. Some big losses over the past ten years have left them gasping for breath. Won't be too long before someone comes along and swallows them up in one bite."
2	"The corp's had a lot of trouble with environmentalists and environmental laws. The UCAS and the NAN have both slapped them down for it, and that's cost them."
3	"Some years back, I heard about a lawsuit against Hawkshorne; a lot of people got poisoned by some pesticide they made. They settled out of court for an undisclosed sum, but rumor has it that it was meganuyen. Really put a dent in their bottom line."
4	"No matter how many times they get slapped down because of enviro-regs, Hawkshorne doesn't learn. They still ignore the regulations whenever it suits them, and that's going to get them in trouble some day."

CALLIEACH'S TEAM

Appropriate Contacts (Target Number 5)

Any Street contact.

Successes	Results
0 or 1	"Who? Never heard of 'em."
2	"Yeah, I've heard of a team like that. They're good—ruthless about getting the job done."
3	"The real driving force is that slitch Callieach. The old crone is tougher than nails and has a heart of ice. She'd sell out her own family if she had any. She's also a good magicker. Shaman, I think."
4	"The raven-lady's team does a lot of corporate dirty work. I'm talking some pretty nasty stuff that a lot of teams would never touch, ya catch? Wetwork, kidnapping, 'personnel adjustment,' the whole lot. Whatever the Johnson is willing to pay for."

ARTHUR VOGEL

Appropriate Contacts (Target Number 3)

Any Corporate or Political contact.

Successes	Results
1	"Vogel has a background in environmental law, plus a sky-high reputation for bringing his opponents down at the negotiating table. He's good in the courtroom, but it's face to face where he really shines."
2	"Vogel brought a lot of class-action suits and other cases against corps accused of environmental violations. Usually got big settlements for his clients, too."
3	"Word has it that Artie made careful use of shadow resources to make sure his cases were as airtight as possible. I've heard about a few people who worked for him, digging up the dirt on his opposition. They handed him the ammo and he knew just where to aim it."

CAST OF SHADOWS

The following NPCs appear in order of their importance to the story.

ALAN RIV

Originally a fiery, idealistic young elf, Riv became a twisted reflection of his former self when an eco-terrorist strike he led went horribly wrong. Because his attempt to work for a better world led to terrible pain and disfigurement, Riv came to believe that the world is a terrible, twisted place and that his ideals were foolish and naive. As he sees things, nobody really cares for anything other than themselves and no one is looking out for tomorrow. Those who do are fools. Riv now has two goals: to increase his personal power by spreading blight wherever he can, and avenging himself on the one man he believes is truly responsible for what happened to him: Arthur Vogel.

Riv is a Toxic Dog shaman, a rabid destroyer of everything he once held dear. He is as twisted with hate and bitterness on the inside as he is scarred on the outside. Depending on his location, there is always a toxic earth or water spirit of Force 5 near him in astral space. In his poisoned lair at the abandoned Hawkshorne Chemical plant, he always has several toxic spirits present. His lair also contains a number of animals that he controls through spells.

The trauma Riv suffered years ago has unhinged his mind, and his speech and mannerisms clearly convey his utter insanity. He is capable of apparently rational action, but he is completely without compassion for the pain and suffering of others. He wants only to avenge what he sees as terrible crimes committed against him, and cares nothing about anything other than achieving this goal. He has a mad hatred of physically attractive people, especially other elves, and he refuses to allow mirrors or other reflective surfaces in his presence.

Riv is subject to traumatic flashbacks during which he relives the events that gave him his disfigurement. If he takes any damage from a spell or other weapon that makes use of corrosives or similar chemicals (such as the acid spell), he flies into a berserk rage, screaming in agony and attacking everyone around him. While in this state, he will not stop until he kills all his opponents or is killed himself; therefore, modifiers to target numbers do not apply.

Attributes

Body: 4
Quickness: 5
Strength: 4
Intelligence: 5
Willpower: 6
Charisma: 6
Essence: 6
Reaction: 5
Magic: 11 (15)

Initiative: 5 + 1D6
Threat/Professional Rating: 6/4
Initiate Grade: 5

Skills

Armed Combat: 4
Conjuring: 7
Electronics (Demolitions): 3
Enchanting: 5
Etiquette (Street): 4
Etiquette (Underground): 6
Firearms: 4
Leadership: 6
Magical Theory: 5
Sorcery: 6
Stealth: 6
Unarmed Combat: 3

Gear

Animal-skull necklace (Power Focus 4)
Lined coat (4/2) covered with symbols and fetishes
Orichalcum-tipped spear (Weapon Focus 4, +2 Reach, 6M Damage)
Uzi III (SMG, 7M, w/Laser Sight and Gas Vent II)

Spells

Combat
Manabolt: 5
Stunball: 6
Urban Renewal: 5

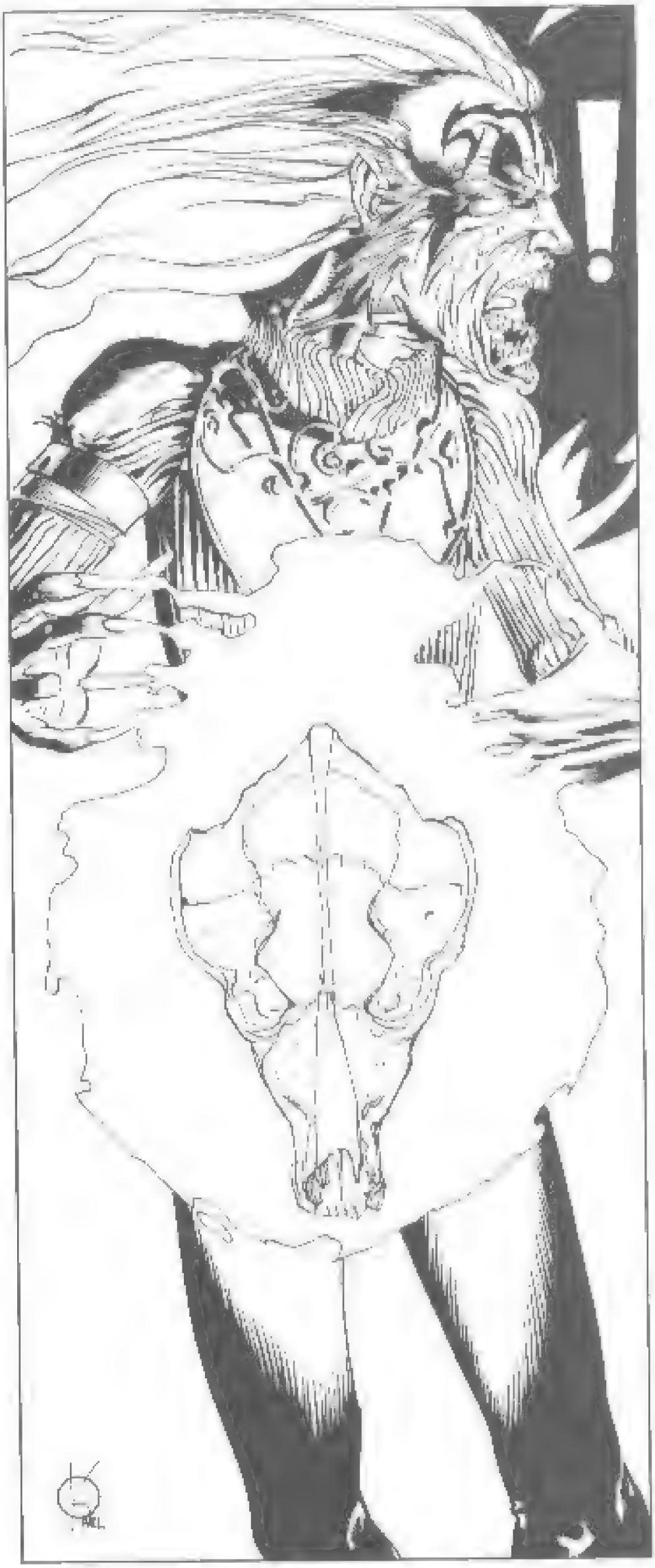
Health
Resist Serious Pain: 2
Treat: 3

Illusion
Agonizing Pain: 6

Detection
Animal Spy: 4
Combat Sense: 3*
Detect Life: 2

Manipulation
Acid: 6
Control Animal: 5
Gecko Crawl: 3*
Personal Physical Barrier: 6
Shadow: 4

*Quickened at the listed Force



SILVER

The daughter of a straight-laced corporate executive, Silver left her stiflingly conformist home when she turned eighteen and launched a solid career in the Seattle shadows. She is a capable shadowrunner who just got in over her head with this particular shadowrun. She specializes in runs calling for stealth and sneaking around security systems—usually break-in and thefts of small, valuable items, something of a dying art in the age of datasteals and wetwork. She prefers runs that let her get in, get the goods and get out with no one the wiser.

Silver looks out for herself, but she also feels a certain responsibility toward those with whom she works. She regards it as a point of honor that shadowrunning teams of which she has been a part have always looked after their own and never sacrificed people for expediency.

Attributes

Body: 5
Quickness: 5
Strength: 3
Intelligence: 4
Willpower: 4
Charisma: 5
Essence: 3.3
Reaction: 5 (7)

Skills

Armed Combat: 4
Athletics: 5
Car: 3
Etiquette (Corporate): 4
Etiquette (Street): 5
Firearms: 6
Stealth: 6
Unarmed Combat: 6

Initiative: 5 (7) +1D6
Threat/Professional Rating: 5/2

Cyberware

Cybereyes w/Low-Light
Smartlink
Wired Reflexes (1)

Gear

Armor clothing (3/0)
Browning Ultra Power (Heavy Pistol, 10 (clip), SA, 9M)
Credstick (fake SIN; 1,500-nuyen balance)
Portable phone
Trauma patch
Stimulant patch (3)

THE OPPOSITION

The shadowrunner team working for Hawkshorne Chemical is a professional group, ruthless and willing to do just about anything for the right price. They're the kind who tend to give shadowrunners a bad name because they take on the dirtier jobs with no questions asked. The player characters may well look down on these utterly mercenary types as poor excuses for shadowrunners, or find them all too accurate reflections of the type of runners they themselves are (if the gamemaster wants to drive home that point).

Callieach

B	Q	S	I	W	C	E	M	R
6	4	5	5	6	5	6	6	4

Initiative: 4 + 1D6
Threat/Professional Rating: 5/3
Skills: Armed Combat (Knife) 5, Conjuring 6, Enchanting 5, Etiquette (Street) 4, Firearms 3, Gaelic (Centering) 5, Magic Theory (Shamanic) 5, Negotiation 5, Sorcery 6
Gear: Armor Clothing (3/0), Feather Cloak (spell lock for raven-form spell), Spell Fetishes, Walking Stick (Manipulation Spell Focus 4), Streetline Special (Hold-out Pistol, 6 (clip), SS, 4L), Thermographic Goggles
Spells: Barrier 6, Clairvoyance 4, Clout 4, Cripple Limb 4, Foretelling 3, Invisibility 2, Magic Fingers 3, Paralyze 5, Poltergeist 4, Raven Form 3, Sap Strength 5, Sleep 6, Thunderclap 6, Wind 5

The leader of the team, Callieach is an ork Raven shaman following a neo-Celtic tradition (she is not a druid, however). Much like her totem, she's a tough and wily old bird, with keen cunning and a strong survival instinct. Insatiably greedy at heart, Callieach calculates her every move based on how much it will profit her. Her fellow runners follow her because their runs together so far have been mutually profitable, but most of them know that Callieach would sell them out in a heartbeat if it suited her purposes. Callieach has no real friendship or camaraderie in her heart, only professional detachment and concern for the profit margin.

Red Lana

B	Q	S	I	W	C	E	R
6 (8)	4 (5)	6 (7)	5	5	2	0.1	5

Initiative: 5 (9) + 3D6
Threat/Professional Rating: 5/3
Skills: Armed Combat (Bladed Weapons) 6, Car 3, Etiquette (Street) 4, Firearms 6, Stealth 5, Unarmed Combat 6
Cyberware: Cybereyes with Low-Light, Dermal Plating 2, Muscle Replacement 1, Retractable Hand Razors, Smartlink, Wired Reflexes 2
Gear: Ares Predator II [Heavy Pistol, 15 (clip), SA, 9M, w/Laser Sight], Armor Jacket (5/3), Ingram Smartgun [SMG, 32 (clip), BF/FA, 7M, w/Smartgun Link], Katana, Thermographic Goggles

Lana is a street samurai of Anglo-Korean extraction, known for the trademark red leather she wears as her "working clothes." She has all the physical attractiveness that modern technology can supply and is quite vain, but has very little warmth or personality to go along with her surface beauty. A skilled killer, Lana has done her share of wetwork in the past and no doubt will continue to take such assignments. She likes to flirt with Webb and may be on the verge of actually developing feelings for him, but she would never admit to them. She tends to watch his back more closely than anyone else's when the team is on the job.

Webb

B	Q	S	I	W	C	E	M	R
6	5	5	3	5	2	6	6	4

Initiative: 4 + 2D6
Threat/Professional Rating: 3/3
Skills: Armed Combat 4, Firearms 5, Stealth 5, Unarmed Combat (Martial Arts) 7 (10)
Adept Powers: Killing Hands (M), Improved Reflexes (1), Improved Unarmed Combat (3), Pain Resistance (3), Smashing Blow
Gear: Armor Jacket (5/3), Browning Ultra Power [Heavy Pistol, 10 (clip), SA, 9M], Thermographic Goggles

Webb is a slim, lithe human of Brazilian ancestry and a powerful physical adept. He is a master of unarmed combat; his hands can smash through solid wood and brick as easily as they smash into flesh. Webb prefers melee combat with an opponent whenever possible and tries to restrict his fights to tight quarters where he can take maximum advantage of his greater agility and smaller frame. He carries a gun and uses it well when necessary, but he takes a certain pleasure from physically beating his opponents into the ground. At all other times he maintains an air of Zen-like detachment and disinterest.

Wheels

B	Q	S	I	W	C	E	R
5	6	4	6	5	4	1.05	6 (10)*

Initiative: 6 (10)* + 1D6 (+ 3D6)*
Threat/Professional Rating: 3/3
Skills: Bike 4, Car 5, Computer 3, Electronics 4, Etiquette (Street) 1, Firearms 2, Gunnery 4, Ground Vehicles (B/R) 3
Cyberware: Cybereyes [w/Low-Light, Flare Protection, and Thermographic Imaging], Datajack, Radio, Smartlink, Vehicle Control Rig 2
Gear: Ares Predator II [Heavy Pistol, 15 (clip), SA, 9M, w/Smartgun Link], Armor Jacket (5/3), EuroCar Westwind 2000 (w/concealed LMG and two-shot AVM launcher), Hunter-Spotter Drone (w/2 LMGs and remote gear), Remote Control Deck, Surveillance Drone

An elf techno-geek, Wheels serves as the team's driver, technician and spymaster. The team combines his drone surveillance capabilities with Callieach's astral scouting to effectively check out and analyze the targets of their runs before they go into action. Wheels doesn't think or care about much beyond his latest electronic toy; shadowrunning for him is something like a giant video game. He only gets really comfortable when he is hiding behind a remote deck or buttoned up in one of his armored vehicles with massive firepower at his fingertips.

ROZILYN HERNANDEZ

PARTY AFFILIATION: NEW CENTURY PARTY

>>>>>Here's a scary one, folks. A nice example of the kind of loony-tunes dreck we can expect to see more of as Election Day draws closer. Take it as a warning not to believe everything you read—most of the basic facts in this are accurate, but the interpretation of them leaves a fragging lot to be desired.)<<<<<

—Caolan Chaos (13:09:45/02-11-57)

FOUR REASONS WHY YOU SHOULDN'T VOTE FOR ROZILYN HERNANDEZ

Dr. Rozilyn Hernandez, well-known university professor and author, may seem like any other candidate in the UCAS Presidential race—a concerned citizen running for public office because she believes she can do some good for the country. DON'T BE FOOLED. This woman is one of the most dangerous public figures in the UCAS today and should not be entrusted with our nation's highest political office. Don't just take our word for it; the facts speak for themselves.

1. For the past 14 years, Dr. Hernandez has been a faculty member at Georgetown University—long known as a hotbed of left-wing, Godless progressivism and elitism. Dr. Hernandez wholeheartedly espouses elitist social theory, as the writings of her own colleagues prove.

"Dr. Hernandez's theories on social development, techno-magic and progress through innovation have met with both acclaim and criticism from her peers. Many have accused her of being something of a 'guru' to her academic adherents. ... She remains a strong advocate of the theory that metahumankind can and must combine technological and magical development to achieve a utopian society."

2. The so-called social sciences in which Dr. Hernandez has built her career have been a bastion of moral relativism and anti-American and Canadian values since their inception. Social scientists and engineers such as Dr. Hernandez gave us the welfare state that nearly bankrupted the United States by the end of the last century. And they continue to encourage the toleration of deviant lifestyles, which have brought our society to new levels of depravity since the curse of the Awakening fell upon us.

3. Dr. Hernandez possesses powerful magical abilities, whose source and nature we can only guess at. These abilities feed her dangerous assumptions that mere human law and human desires are the highest moral authority, and they reinforce her natural tendency to deny the presence of God in our universe. Such thinking has spawned the rampant crime and BTL use that plague our cities and towns, as well as blatant immorality in every sphere of public life.

4. Dr. Hernandez is an initiate of the hermetic magical order known as the Illuminates of the New Dawn. This secret cabal of powerful magicians intends to take over the world and run it as they see fit. Who knows to what nefarious ends they will turn their vast, inhuman powers? Are they the latter-day heirs of demon-worshipers and cults that have always worked toward the ascendancy of Evil? CAN WE AFFORD TO FIND OUT THE HARD WAY?

Now that you know the truth, it's up to YOU to stop the takeover of the UCAS by Godless mage-o-crats and their allies. Please pass this voting guide along to a fellow citizen at your earliest opportunity. And remember: THE COUNTRY YOU SAVE MAY BE YOUR OWN.

Paid for by One Nation Under God, a not-for-profit citizen advocacy group.

>>>>>(Hernandez is a skilled mage, especially when it comes to theory. She could have been another Akiko Kano if she had decided to go into pure magical research rather than social sciences.)<<<<<

—Silicon Mage (12:31:18/02-12-57)

>>>>>(Everyone is calling these guys the "granola party"—cuz it's chock full of fruits, nuts and flakes. Don't let the neo-New Age

trappings and rhetoric fool you, these people are as politically savvy as they come and they're willing to do whatever it takes to advance their cause in the political arena. Roz Hernandez may look like your kindly old aunt, but she's as sharp as a monoblade and just as dangerous.)<<<<<

—Talon (21:47:03/02-14-57)

>>>>>(Don't forget about her magical chummers, either. The Illuminates of the New Dawn are a for-real hermetic magical order and they can sling some powerful mojo. I'm talkin' serious ritual magic here. A lot of people have to wonder about a presidential candidate who has ties to a group like that.)<<<<<

—Magister (18:04:21/02-15-57)

>>>>>(Hey, is it just me or does this Hernandez chica remind anyone else of another social-scientist with theories of social utopia from a few years back?)<<<<<

—Sidewinder (01:12:23/02-19-57)

>>>>>(You're talking about Caitlin O'Connor, aren't you? Are you implying that these guys are some kind of new Universal Brotherhood?!)<<<<<

—Archangel (22:01:14/02-20-57)

>>>>>(I dunno, chummer. I'm just pointing out a disturbing similarity, that's all.)<<<<<

—Sidewinder (00:32:49/02-20-57)

>>>>>(Interesting point, considering that the NCP is actually pulling in a lot of former members of the UB who bailed out when the UCAS government closed them down. Hope their screening process is a good one.)<<<<<

—DC Insider (20:03:42/02-22-57)

>>>>>(Anyone got any paydata on some kind of UB connection? Anything?)<<<<<

—Vengeance (07:12:09/02-23-57)

>>>>>(Guess not.)<<<<<

—Mamba (05:55:06/02-28-57)

>>>>>(McMulkin was an interesting choice for VP. He's been part of the UCAS simsense industry almost from the start and was known for giving "good-X" to his audience. He's got a lot of stage presence and the training to really put forth the image that people want to see. There are also a lot of people who feel like they know him because they've experienced one of his sims. That gives people a sense of intimacy with McMulkin that few of the other candidates can match. Almost too bad he isn't the presidential candidate instead of Hernandez.)<<<<<

—DocSpy (14:04:52/03-01-57)

>>>>>(Rammy McMulkin has also given the NCP a truly unique campaigning technique. The party has begun making simsense recordings of McMulkin's POV during parts of the campaign. They're distributing these recordings on chip and downloading them over the Matrix. These "first-hand" accounts of the campaign are generating real sympathy in voters for the trials and tribulations of the New Century Party as they bravely struggle to right a world gone mad—and sales of the recordings are filling the party's coffers (and ICNDI's, I suspect).)<<<<<

—VidRunner (00:32:17/03-03-57)

>>>>>(Yeah, and what's been done with those sims to make them so appealing, eh? A chummer of mine suspects that the NCP has inserted subliminals or psychotropics into the baselines of those sim-chips—subliminals that'll make sure people vote for Hernandez when the time comes.)<<<<<

—Know-It-All (18:02:51/03-03-57)

THE NEW CENTURY PARTY: BUILDING A PARTY FOR THE FUTURE

>>>>>(To balance the scary place up above, and give you folks a better idea of what the New Century policy wonks are up to, here's the pamphlet put out by the New Century Party flacks over their public file server. It provides a pretty good outline of what these mooks want—which is pretty much whatever Roz Hernandez wants, so it sums her up pretty well, too.)<<<<<

—Captain Chaos (10:42:19/02-14-57)

The New Century Party (NCP), an idea that began with one woman willing to stand up for her political ideals, is now a reality. We've raised some money, set up a national office and incorporated as a party. We're starting to sign up members and build local chapters and state organizations. The train is pulling out of the station and we're inviting you to climb on board as we ride into the future.

THE BIG IDEA

The NCP seeks to establish a significant progressive presence in UCAS politics—one that will enable us to make the changes needed to face the challenges that lie ahead for our nation. We have few illusions about the difficulty of achieving this ambitious goal, but we are dedicated and willing to spend the time and effort needed to build something that will last. We are confident that a genuinely progressive party can command very broad popular support. And we believe that, with the help of people like you, the New Century can become that party.

WHY BOTHER?

What motivates us to make the NCP effort? Convictions, some anger fueled by those convictions, and some hope.

What We Believe

In her book *Legacy of the American Dream*, Dr. Rozilyn Hernandez writes, "The founders of our nation dreamed of a free and equal society in which enlightened politicians represented an educated electorate and the advancement of knowledge was paramount." We take that dream seriously. We believe in a nation guided by the same enlightened ideals of equality, opportunity, freedom and knowledge that informed the great patriots and thinkers of UCAS history. And we intend to restore those qualities to our nation.

Why We're Angry

Present-day UCAS politics has fallen far from the ideals of our nation's founders. Today, our capital is a bastion of privilege and exclusion, and a sewer of corruption. Our leaders regularly demean the citizens of this country and have miserably failed to secure the general welfare of those same citizens. We are fed up with this system and the policies it produces. We think they're not only cruel and unfortunate, but stupid and unnecessary. We don't believe that declining living standards, rising poverty and inequality, bad jobs and low wages, ruined farms and unaffordable housing, racial and gender injustice, lying politicians, rigged elections, and environmental disaster are unavoidable consequences of progress, a commitment to liberty or human nature.

Our technology isn't doing enough. Even magic, the new wonder of our age, isn't doing enough. Neither of these forces has lived up to its real potential to transform our lives for the better. We can and must do far better as a society. We need to take back the reins of power and guide the world into a new era. The judicious use of magic and technology working together can bring about the innovations that our nation needs. We can still fulfill the promise of the twenty-first century.

What We Want

We want to invest in ourselves and in our nation—in health, education, housing, retraining and infrastructure. We want an economy that doesn't ruin our living standards, wreck our home lives or destroy the environment on which we all depend. We want a more egalitarian distribution of education throughout the course of life, and a much better distribution of resources to meet the basic needs of our children. We want to reward hard work with better wages and working conditions.

We want a government that works and a political process uncorrupted by big-money interests. We want to be secure in our homes and parks and streets. We want fair and efficient taxes, high enough to fund a decent level of public good but low enough to keep every working family comfortable. We want a society in which metatype doesn't determine moral fitness, gender doesn't determine opportunity and sexual orientation doesn't lead to ostracism.

We want a society in which every child is housed and fed and decently educated, a society that respects parents for doing the hard work of raising and nurturing our future. We want a nation that will stand tall in the world—but not on the backs of the poor and hungry of other nations. We want, in short, to take this country back from its current "leaders" and to run it for the benefit of all. We want government "of the people, by the people, for the people." It's that simple.

Why We Have Hope

The Awakening has given us hope. The so-called Year of Chaos has provided a chance to renew our nation and our people with a powerful new tool—magic. We believe that magic can be the source of newfound prosperity and security for our nation just as it has been for so many of the other nations of the Sixth World.

Of course, it's a long way from unorganized opinion to political power, but the fact that most people want the same things we do certainly helps. Forming a political party fueled by convictions isn't going to change things overnight, but it will help. We have the will and the desire—now we need to act in accordance with that will and make these things happen.

What the New Century Party Can Do

Right now, the progressive community is far less than the sum of its parts. The community buzzes with activity, but that activity is fragmented, unorganized and unfocused. Coalitions abound, but many are temporary or organized around narrow issues. The community harbors a plethora of policlubs and splinter groups, but none of those groups has the broad appeal needed to get things done. We sense that people are weary of this situation and are looking for some way to coordinate progressive political activity, broaden its agenda and sustain its efforts.

The New Century Party can do these things without competing with or disrupting the activities of existing organizations. The party can define a progressive vision and stake out a progressive agenda in ideological space. And the party can provide a structure for political participation that enables even the busiest citizen to make his or her voice known. In short, the New Century Party can unite all progressive citizens and translate their commitment into effective political action.

Is the NCP feasible? That depends on how much time and energy people are willing to invest, and we can't answer that question in a pamphlet. But we certainly see lots of reasons for trying.

The only real barrier to our success is our own idea of what progressive activity entails. Most longtime activists we know of are tired of short-term coalitions and narrow issues; they don't want to join yet another "group." But they do want to be part of something larger—an institution that will outlive its founders and guide our nation through the rest of this century and beyond. By creating that institution—a party for the future of the UCAS—we can provide ample motivation for concerned citizens across this country to join the NCP.

So far, our ideas have received a hearty reception from a wide variety of people. To be sure, the NCP staff is not yet as diverse as the population we aim to serve. But we have talked to people of all classes, races, genders, sexual orientations and political organizations, and we have found that many of them interested in the ideas we offer. And as more people learn of the NCP, its appeal is certain to broaden even further.

As we begin, we admit to optimism. There is something in the air right now in UCAS politics that favors a new beginning, a hope for positive change. People are fed up with business as usual and with mainstream political parties, which seem interested only in defeating progress and common sense. The New Century Party is ready to try something new. And a critical mass of ordinary citizens, tired of having their convictions distorted, ignored, or broken by the machinery of public life, seem ready to join us.

What About You?

To join us or receive more information about the NCP, contact us at LTG# (4505). For a complete simsense download of Ms. Hernandez's opening speech go to UCAS/DC/PUB/Presidential/NCP

STRANGE ATTRACTION: A PROLOGUE

The night is clear and still, with only a sliver of moon to see by. Lucky for you, low-light vision can get by with the faint light of the stars. To light up anything brighter would be a mistake—and after a run like the one you've just been through, you don't dare make any mistakes. And the run's not quite over yet. Picking up the item is just one part of a smuggling job; the really hard part is getting it over the border and back to the client so you can collect your nuyen.

You prowl step by step through the dark woodland toward the Tir border. Just a little farther and you'll be in NAN territory, where you've arranged to hitch your ride back to the metroplex. From there, you're home free. The border is almost in sight now, and you let out the breath you didn't even know you'd been holding.

A small sound catches your ear and you freeze. Barely breathing, you strain to hear the sound again—or anything that might tell you what it was or where it came from. But all you can hear are the normal noises of a forest at night. Your own heart beats so loudly in your ears that you can't help worrying it'll give you away. Cautiously, you begin to move again. Not much farther now.

Then you hear the sound again, this time much closer and more distinct. You recognize the whir of a rotorcraft, and everyone scatters for cover. A Yellowjacket chopper, one of the small single-man patrol copters used by the Tir border patrol, buzzes overhead. A bright searchlight stabs down into the dark woods like a blazing spear, illuminating the area more brightly than sunlight. You crouch in the undergrowth, motionless. Best to stay quiet and let them pass. Trying to shoot your way out is about as smart as sending up a flare; other patrols will come running to the spot in minutes, and you can't take them all. So you wait.

The search beam plays around in the darkness, sifting through the branches and trees and sniffing along the ground. What the frag is taking so long? Do they suspect something? Why don't they move on? The seconds tick past like hours as the chopper scans the area. Then the searchlight moves slowly away, fading into the forest along with the buzzing sound of the chopper as it heads west along its prescribed route.

You wait until you can't see the light anymore and the sound of the rotors is almost too faint to hear. Then you get up, shake out your stiff limbs and brush yourselves off. You're practically at the border; you can make it in ten or fifteen minutes if you hurry.

The elves suddenly appear out of nowhere, with no sound to warn you of their approach. Or maybe you were just too busy listening to the retreating Yellowjacket. You spring into action, but they have the advantage of surprise. The elves' guns cough and several of your teammates fall to the leafy forest floor. As you make your move on the nearest elf, his compatriot turns toward you, a faint shimmer forming in the air around his outstretched hand.

The spell hits you like a truck. You try to fight it off but it cascades over you like a smothering blanket. Your vision dims and blurs as the spell explodes behind your eyes. Mercifully, you pass out.

You wake up, which is the first good thing. You wake up with enough presence of mind not to move or do anything to show that you're awake, which is the second. You're lying on a floor of stone or ferrocrete. It's cold and slightly damp, and the air is chilly. Probably a cell—lucky you. You strain to make out faint sounds nearby. Voices, people talking. At first you can't hear what they're saying, but then the voices come closer and are easier to make out. They're speaking English, not that airy-fairy elvish drek. The sound of footsteps against the hard floor stops just a short distance away.

"Any identification?" one voice says.

"Only these forgeries, sir," answers the second.

Someone sniffs. Then the first voice says, "Have they been checked for contraband data?"

Voice Number Two's turn again. "We scanned all their storage systems, including cybernetics. They are carrying no illegal information of concern to us. A few pirate programs—"

"But no contraband?" says Voice Number One.

"No, sir."

Someone sniffs again—probably Voice Number One. "Shadowrunning scum," says One, in the tone of voice you usually reserve for describing dog mess on your shoe. "Very well—standard procedure. Dose them and dispose of them."

"Sielle, sir," says Voice Number Two as Number One's footsteps recede down the hall. Several other sets of footsteps seem to be approaching. Your mind starts racing—you've got to get out of here. You don't know if the others are awake or even alive, and you're not sure what the elves are planning on doing with you—but "dispose" has an unpleasantly permanent ring to it.

As you hear the cell door open you spring into action, hoping to slam past the guards and run. You catch them by surprise and manage to push past the lead elf, who's carrying a hypo syringe. Then the guards outside the door shove you hard against the cold ferrocrete wall. The elf with the hypo turns toward you, rubbing his shoulder where you smacked into it. He smiles.

"Well, well," he says, "a volunteer." He presses the syringe to your neck and fires its contents into your bloodstream. The world around you starts to blur. Your last coherent thought is a hazy hope that you'll wake up in a nicer place next time.

INTRODUCTION

In **Strange Attraction**, the runners wake up just outside the Tir Tairngire border—with no memory of how they got there. They find a mysterious orichalcum key in their possession—a key that seems to have a great deal of magical power—and distinctive gold and silver pins attached to the lapels of their evening wear.

When they get back home, the runners receive a mysterious call from a panicked fixer whom they can't remember. The fixer rants about a shadowrun they supposedly have performed recently—a run they cannot recall. Eventually, the runners discover that several other parties know of this mysterious shadowrun and the orichalcum key. And when a group of hostile elves roughs up the fixer, the runners realize that these parties are willing to kill for the key.

Seeking information about the item, the runners find a talismonger who identifies the key as a powerful talisman. In the end, the runners must decide what to do with the key—and how to stay alive.

Strange Attraction assumes that the runners work out of Seattle, but the adventure can easily be transplanted elsewhere if necessary. The adventure is presented in a free-form structure. Use the supplied background and opening encounter to get the runners started. The middle encounters provide several major locations and personalities with whom the runners can interact as they attempt to solve the mystery of the key. The final encounter provides guidelines for the adventure's most likely conclusions.

WHAT THE FRAG HAPPENED?

About two weeks before the adventure begins, the runners were contacted by a fixer named Beaumont Noble, or "Bono," as he is known on the street. Bono represents the Illuminates of the New Dawn, a DeeCee magical order that is backing presidential candidate Rozilyn Hernandez. Bono hired the runners to pick up a certain item from a contact in Portland and smuggle it back to Seattle undetected by the Tir Tairngire authorities. The runners accepted the job.

Posing as members of the Illuminates of the New Dawn (using special diplomatic passes and lapel pins supplied to them by Bono), the runners had no problem meeting the Illuminate contact in Portland, a rich art collector named Birch Kirby. After feeding them a sumptuous meal, Kirby gave them the item—an orichalcum key with a strange magical aura. Kirby's driver then deposited the runners near the Tir border.

The run hit a small snag when the runners' fake papers caught up with them as they tried to leave the country. Following standard procedure, the border patrol dosed them with Ixés, a memory-erasing drug, and deposited them outside the Tir border. As a result, the runners awaken with no memory of the run, how they got to the Tir border or what they are doing there. The key, lapel pins and some bizarre flashbacks are the only clues the runners have to their activities of the past few days.

Meanwhile, the runners become the object of an intense manhunt. Unknown to them, the key is a powerful talisman highly prized by some powerful individuals in Tir Tairngire. When these people discovered the theft of the key, a team of Tir special agents set out to recover it before news of its disappearance could reach the outside world. The agents tracked the missing key to Birch and extracted information about the runners from him before killing him.

Hobbled by their Ixés-induced amnesia, the runners failed to show up at the pre-arranged meet site in Seattle to turn the key over to Bono. The fixer assumed that the runners had double-crossed him, and so he went underground to avoid the wrath of *his* employer—the Illuminates of the New Dawn.

As a result of these events, the runners find themselves receiving unwanted attention as their adventure begins. The Tir agents, known as Ghosts, want to find Bono and the runners and retrieve the key. Aztechnology, which has learned of the theft, also wants the key. The Illuminates, of course, want the key as well. And all of these groups will kill to get it.

RUDE AWAKENING

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

You wake up feeling like you've just slept off a three-day binge. Your vision swims as you open your eyes. You try to sit up. Out of habit, you reach to your side to get a look at the alarm clock. That's when you realize that there's no clock. In fact, there's no bed, no bedroom and no building. No buildings at all. You're lying on a bed of grass and dead leaves in the middle of a small clearing surrounded by woods. Pale moonlight illuminates the scene.

There's nothing like waking up in a strange place to get you going, and the shot of adrenaline allows you to quickly shake off any last remnants of sleep as you work to get your bearings. You notice several of your shadowrunning chummers lying around you, and a battered duffel bag lies within arm's reach. Just as you lean toward it, you hear a low, dull growl off to one side. You turn to see several shaggy forms standing only a few meters off. One of them lets loose a low, mournful howl as the pack of them charges toward you.

Once the runners have dealt with the barghests, read the following aloud:

You do a quick check to figure out how you got here and what you were doing. The last thing any of you recalls is getting together to check out some possibilities for biz because things had gotten slow lately. Apparently things have picked up, but not in a way you're going to like.

You're all dressed like corporate slags out for a posh night on the town. No heavy ordinance or ammo, either. None of you have any ID, which is unusual. All of you are wearing identical pins on your lapels (or as tie tacks), but you have no idea what they mean. One of you, <**insert character's name**>, is carrying an unusual piece of equipment—an old-fashioned key about ten centimeters long, made of some goldish-colored metal. None of you can recall seeing it before, though it looks oddly familiar. Unfortunately, it's not going to tell you much about where you are or how the frag you're going to get back to civilization.

HOOKS

Welcome to weird city. The runners should start off thoroughly confused. They've just woken up in a strange place with no memory of how they got there. Offer the runners some clues about their situation, but let them draw their own conclusions at this point.

BEHIND THE SCENES

The runners are in Salish-Shidhe, a few kilometers from the Tir Tairngire border. A Tir border patrol deposited them here after dosing them with the memory-erasing drug Iaés. They're in Sinsearach territory, not far from the Route 5 highway, where they might be able to hitch a ride (see **Getting Back Home**, p. 42). It's about 1 a.m. when the runners awaken; they immediately encounter a pack of hungry barghests that has been stalking them. At the first signs of movement by the runners, the lead barghest produces a paralyzing howl and the entire pack attacks.

Barghests (4)

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	R
7	6 x 4	5	—	3/6	3	(6)	6

Initiative: 6 + 2D6
Threat/Professional Rating: 3/2
Powers: Enhanced Senses (Sonar), Fear, Paralyzing Howl (opposed by Willpower)
Weaknesses: Allergy (Sunlight, Strong)

THE RUNNERS' GEAR

The runners are disguised as a minor-league corporate VIP and his or her entourage out for a fancy evening on the town. They are wearing armor clothing and/or form-fitting body armor, and carry only light weapons at best (pistols and holdouts). Magician characters may also be carrying some of their foci. Generally speaking, outfit the characters as appropriate for an undercover run into Tir Tairngire. Use common sense about what the runners would and would not carry with them. They possessed falsified diplomatic papers and identification that allowed them to pass through border checks with their cyberware and magical abilities, but those papers would not have allowed them to carry any major firepower (physical or magical) without attracting undue notice. The false papers and documents are gone, taken by the Tir border patrol. If you are feeling particularly cruel, assume that the border patrol has relieved the characters of their weapons as well. If not, assume that all the runners' gear has been stuffed into the duffel bag lying nearby (**Tell it to Them Straight**).

The runners may possess other equipment, but they do not have any survival gear appropriate for a long trek through the wilderness. If they want to survive, they must quickly figure out where they are and how they are going to get back home.

THE KEY

One of the runners (gamemaster's choice) is carrying an orichalcum key. It resembles the ancient mechanical keys common two centuries ago, about ten centimeters long with an ornate design. None of the runners has ever seen anything like it. The shaft and head of the key are carved to resemble a tree. Parts of the key's elaborate carvings and filigree are worn smooth with age and handling, but otherwise the key is in good condition, and its surface holds a dull shine. The key is virtually indestructible. The runners cannot even scratch it, no matter what physical or magical force they apply to it. This is real magic at work.

ASTRAL EXAMINATION TABLE

Successes	Information
1	The key has a powerful enchantment of a kind the magician has never seen before. The key's aura is difficult to read.
2	The key displays an aura of great age—it is impossible to tell how old, but the magician can sense that it is truly ancient.
3	The magics of the key are concerned primarily with unlocking or opening. It is capable of channeling very powerful forces.
4+	The key's power can be used for unbinding and other forms of magical unlocking and opening.

Any magician character can examine the key astrally by making an Astral Perception (8) Test. Consult the Astral Examination Table to determine what the character discovers.

In addition to this information, the character experiences a strange tingling sensation while examining the key astrally.

Any magician character who holds the key can use it as a focus for magical feats that open, unlock or unbind, such as dispelling or banishing. When used in this way, the key acts as a Rating 8 Power Focus that does not require bonding.

GETTING BACK HOME

Any character with appropriate outdoor survival skills can find shelter and even clean water for the whole team by making a successful Survival (4) Test. If a character has some knowledge of the local geography in the Pacific Northwest (in the gamemaster's judgment) and can find a suitably high vantage point (through physical or magical methods), the character can calculate that the group is in Salish-Shidhe tribal lands, some distance south of the Seattle metroplex. Characters with Navigation or Astronomy skills can calculate the group's location by observing the positions of the stars. At the gamemaster's discretion, characters may be able to calculate their location by using other skills.

Once the runners have calculated their location, they need to figure out how they are going to get home. Walking to Seattle will take a couple of days if the characters make good time, but doing so requires the characters to pass through dozens of kilometers of wild and relatively unknown tribal lands.

The runners may make their way to Highway 5 and try to hitch a ride there. Few motorists in the Sixth World pick up hitchhikers, but the runners have the advantage of looking like poor, lost corporates rather than hardened shadowrunners. They might try to use Charisma or Social skills to persuade one of the rare passing motorists to give them a ride. However, the runners may have better luck hitching a ride on one of the many drone-controlled hauling trucks that ply the run between Portland and Seattle. Generally, these trucks move at speeds of up to 90 kph, so the runners will have to figure out some way to stop one of them. Once they have gained access to the cab of a drone-truck, any character with a Vehicle Control Rig can automatically override the drone-truck's automatic guidance systems. Alternatively, a character can assume control of a drone-truck by making a successful Electronics (6) Test.

Make the runners sweat a bit during their attempt to find transportation. If they seem to be succeeding too easily, throw them a curve. For example, runners who attempt to hijack a vehicle may discover that its driver is a powerful mage more than willing to fight back.

FLASHBACKS

The characters have been dosed with lace, an amnesia-inducing drug. However, this does not mean that the characters recall nothing of their recent experiences. Instead, they experience flashbacks, strange memories that they cannot place. Specific stimuli usually trigger these flashbacks, but moments of stress or panic may induce them as well if the gamemaster so desires. Stress-induced flashbacks may be particularly dangerous, as they distract a character from the task at hand. A few sample flashbacks and the stimuli that trigger them are given below. Use as many or as few as you like and feel free to create your own.

Trigger: The player character examines his or her lapel pin.
Flashback: The character sees the pin's logo emblazoned on a giant banner. In front of the banner, a woman is giving some sort of speech. The memory seems to come from a simlink projection.

Trigger: The player character examines the clothes he or she is wearing.
Flashback: The character remembers passing papers to a guard, who responds in a deferential manner and wishes the character well.

Trigger: The player character examines the key.
Flashback: The character remembers sitting in a large dining room and eating a huge meal. During the meal, a short man brings a locked box into the room and talks in hushed tones, as if he was telling a secret.

Trigger: The player character examines the group's bag of gear.
Flashback: The character remembers being surrounded by elves. He remembers sitting in a room with bright lights and hearing loud voices asking him the same questions over and over again.

DEBUGGING

Don't be too rough on the runners in this encounter. Being stranded in the middle of nowhere with little equipment and no easy way to get back to civilization should present enough trouble for most shadow teams. Remember that this scene is simply intended to set the stage for the rest of the adventure.

Use common sense when outfitting the runners. Keep the disguise they used to enter the Tir and equipment that they would plausibly have taken with them. Assume that the guard patrol that captured them was careless enough to dispose of the shadowrunners before searching them thoroughly. This encounter provides a convenient opportunity to relieve the runners of any bothersome equipment, but don't deprive the players of gear unnecessarily.

BONO KNOWS

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

Ah, Seattle. Endless vista of chrome, neon and dirty concrete. Back to the grimy, smelly, noisy streets full of chipped-out, jacked-up fashion victims who'd knife their mothers for a few nuyen. There really is no place like home. The streets are buzzing with action these days. Everyone is out to get the dirt on everyone else, and the whole election mess in the UCAS is going to make a lot of people in the shadows very rich—or very dead. You're planning on being in the first group if at all possible.

You really hope that the message waiting for you when you get home is an explanation of what happened to you out near Elfland ... or at least a chance to make some nuyen. You check the talk-box and replay the message with high hopes that fall pretty quickly when you hear the panicked voice:

"Where the frag are you? Please be there... ." After a long pause, the nervous voice speaks up again over the murmur of background noise. "Okay, I've gotta talk to you about the job. There have been some, uh, complications. Meet me at the 93 as soon as you can, okay? This is fraggin' big, omae. Don't tell anyone, just get here quick, okay? Be there."

Who the frag was that? And why is he calling you like he knows you or something? And why is he trying to set up a meet without telling you how you're supposed to recognize each other in a place as busy as the Underworld 93? You hope there's some nuyen and some answers behind all those question marks.

Read the following aloud when the characters arrive at the 93:

The night sky is dark above the neon-lit towers of the metroplex, the stars hidden by the glow of the city lights. The air is crisp and cool, with a slight chemical-metallic tang from the recent rainfall. You grin as you make your way around to the front of the club and exchange nods with Newt, the hulking troll bouncer. You're known here, which usually works to your advantage.

The club, a huge, vaulted, ferrocrete building looks like the converted warehouse it is. The gray stone walls are criss-crossed by metal catwalks and platforms, all filled with club rats sitting at little tables or leaning over the railings to yell at the band that's flailing about with their instruments on stage.

There's plenty going on, but outside of a few familiar faces that nod at you, you don't see anyone who seems to take much interest in you. You grab a table by the dance floor and resolve to wait and enjoy the music until this slag shows up or you get bored and decide to look elsewhere for something to do tonight.

After a few minutes, your patience is rewarded. You see a guy making his way through the crowd toward you. He's on the small and scrawny side, and he's slouching like he wants to disappear into his oversized synthleather jacket. His pale face is covered in several days' growth of beard and he wears old wire-framed glasses that emphasize the nervous way his eyes are flicking around.

He glances off to one side and his face takes on a look that screams, "oh, drek!" With a last glance in your direction, he starts heading across the dance floor away from you, pushing people out of his way as he goes. In the direction the poor slot was looking, you see three tall, long-haired elves clad in dark, long coats running and pushing through the crowd. Looks like your pigeon is in some real trouble. Maybe you too, for that matter. You knew there was something wrong about this.

HOOKS

This encounter pulls the runners right into the story. Encourage any paranoia the players may start experiencing. Things are happening that they know nothing about; like it or not, they are already in the middle of something big, just like Bono said. Make sure the players get the message that they're in trouble right from the start. Keep the scene moving and don't give the players time to ask a lot of questions yet.

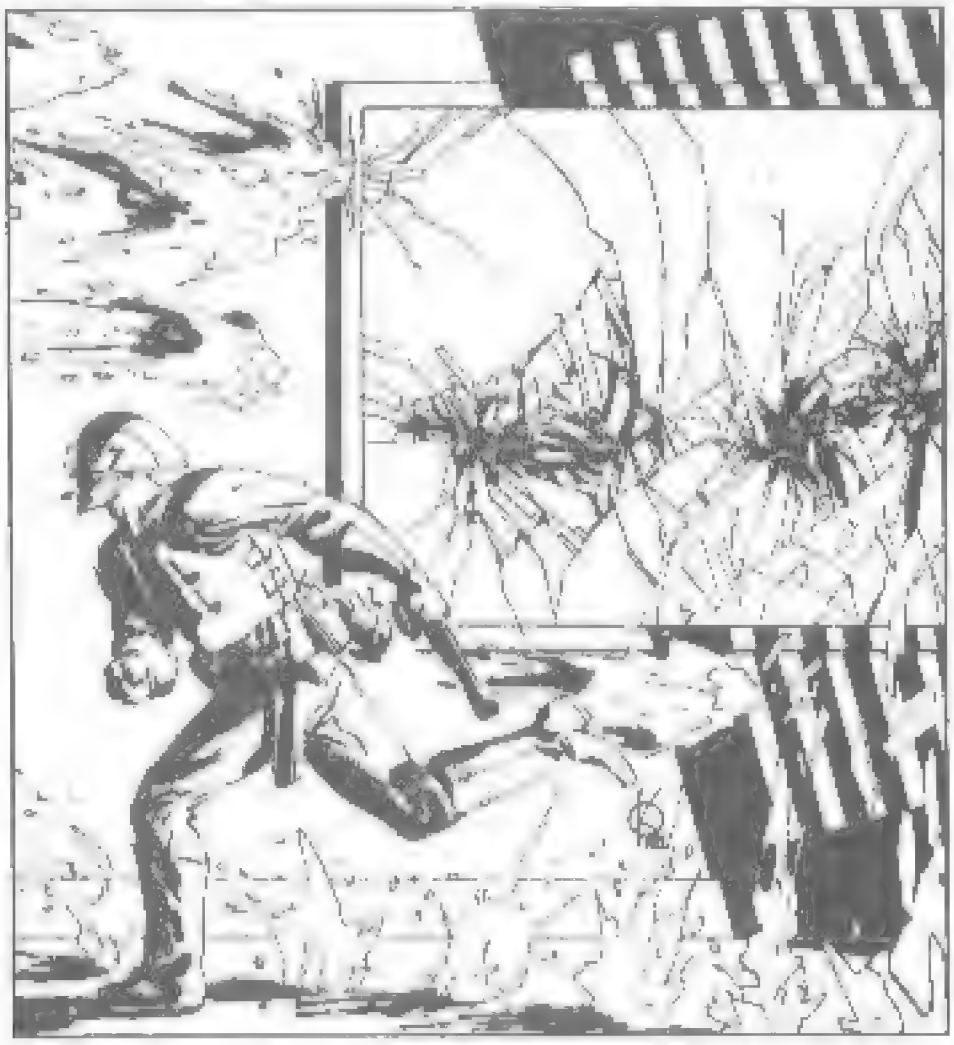
BEHIND THE SCENES

Bono is on the run from both the Tir Ghosts and the Illuminates of the New Dawn because he believes (correctly) that both groups want him in connection with the key. Paranoid at the best of times, Bono bolted at the first sign of trouble and since then he has been trying to get hold of the player characters so that he can recover the key and avoid getting killed.

The Ghosts, acting under orders from certain factions within Tir Tairngire, are led by the mage Speren Silverblade (see **Cast of Shadows**, p. 50, for Silverblade's statistics). They began their search for the stolen artifact with Birch Kirby, but they were not fast enough to stop the runners in Portland. The trail led them to the Tir border guards who captured and released the runners, unaware of the precious contraband they carried. Now the Ghosts have followed the trail to Seattle and have connected Bono to the run. Silverblade wants to question the fixer about the run, the whereabouts of the player characters and the key. When Bono spots the elves moving toward him in the 93, his paranoia kicks into high gear and he runs for the back exit of the club.

Unless the runners intervene, the Ghosts catch Bono in the alley outside the club, subdue him and take him to their waiting car. If the runners act, the Ghosts (the two who entered with Silverblade and one other who is keeping watch outside) immediately change their priority to capturing any of the runners alive. Silverblade will call in the other two members of his team once he spots the runners, so the runners may want to escape the scene with Bono as quickly as possible.

The Ghosts use melee combat and stun attacks, along with Silverblade's sleep and bind spells, to try to apprehend the runners for interrogation. They avoid using deadly force if at all possible. If the



fight begins to turn against them or begins to attract too much attention from the authorities, the Ghosts disappear into the shadows.

Tir Ghosts (5)

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	M	R
5	6	5	5	5	5	6	7	5

Initiative: 5 + 2D6
Threat/Professional Rating: 4/3
Initiate Grade: 1
Skills: Armed Combat 6 (9), Athletics 5 (7), Car 4, Carromeleg (Centering Kata) 5, Etiquette (Elven) 4, Stealth 6 (8), Unarmed Combat 6
Adept Powers: Enhanced Centering (Combat Skills), Improved Ability (Armed Combat: 3), Improved Ability (Athletics: 2), Improved Ability (Stealth: 2), Improved Reflexes (1), Killing Hands (5L damage), Pain Resistance (2)
Gear: Crusader [Machine Pistol, 40 (clip), SA/BF, 6L], Lined Coat (4/2), Monoknife (8L), Shock Glove (7S Stun)
Note: The Ghosts have several safe houses in the area where they can acquire most standard equipment they might need.

If the runners save Bono from the Ghosts, the fixer is appreciative but berates the runners for double-crossing him and then taking their sweet time about showing up, despite the fraggin' high stakes and his head on the chopping block. He gives them the information listed under **What Bono Knows** and tells them that they need to work together if they want to get their hoops out of the fire. He's hoping that the runners can fill in the blanks about what happened to the package and the run and why things seem to be all fragged up, but he is in for a disappointment.

What Bono Knows

If and when Bono gets a chance to talk to the runners, he tells them all he knows about the run—which is not a whole lot. He says that a man named Nicholas Grace paid him to hire the runners for a simple transfer of goods in Portland. The runners were supposed to pick up an art object from an art collector in Portland and smuggle it back to Seattle. The run went down fine as far as he knew, until the runners failed to report to him as planned. Bono assumed that something had gone wrong and decided to bolt from his usual place and hide out until he could find out what was going on. At that point he contacted the runners and asked them to meet him at the 93. Bono is pretty sure that Grace is none too pleased with the delay, but he thinks he can convince Grace to arrange another meet for the runners to turn over the key—which is the best way to be done with the whole thing, in his opinion.

FLASHBACKS

The runners may experience additional flashbacks when they encounter Bono and the Ghosts, such as the following examples:

Trigger: The player character hears Bono's voice.
Flashback: The character remembers meeting someone in a dark club, who handed him or her some papers and a lapel pin.

Trigger: The player character sees the Ghosts.
Flashback: The character remembers being locked in a cold cell with very little clothing. He or she remembers being tied down and recollects an elf dressed as a doctor entering the room with a large syringe in his hand.

DEBUGGING

If the runners start trouncing the Tir Ghosts outside the Underworld 93, congratulations—you've got a tough team on your hands. In this case, Silverblade orders his team to withdraw so he can re-evaluate his plans to recover the key from the runners. Remember that any fight outside the 93 attracts the attention of the authorities eventually, so neither side is advised to prolong things. In any case, the Ghosts will use the arrival of any law-enforcement personnel to escape from the runners and disappear into the shadows. If desired, have Belladonna make an appearance (see **Deadly Nightshade,** p. 47). Nothing changes the tide of a fire fight faster than a third party taking sniper shots from the roof of a building. Using Belladonna in this encounter can also increase the runners' paranoia. If she appears, Belladonna will take only a few shots at the characters or the Ghosts (at the gamemaster's discretion) before pulling out and returning later in **Deadly Nightshade**.

If the Ghosts defeat and capture the runners, go to **What'd We Do?** (p. 45).

If the runners avoid capture by holding off or defeating the Ghosts or simply ignoring Bono's plight, go to **Deadly Nightshade**. The runners will still have no idea what is going on and one of their best leads may be dead, in the hands of the Tir agents, or both.

If the runners and Bono avoid capture, go to **Deadly Nightshade**.

WHAT'D WE DO?

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

"We need to talk," the voice says. "You have made some very important people very angry, my little *goronagee*."

This waking-up-in-strange-places thing is starting to become a habit. Now what? Oh, right, now you remember. As you regain consciousness, you force yourself to stay calm and take stock of your surroundings.

"No use playing possum—I can see by your aura that you're awake," the voice says. "I have some questions for you regarding a shadowrun you performed recently.

You open your eyes and look around. You're in an almost featureless room. On one wall is a window covered with heavy curtains, and a single door. You hope you're still in the metroplex, because you're getting real tired of hitching rides.

One of the elves you saw at the 93 is standing in the room. He's tall and wears his long dark hair tied back in a ponytail to reveal his pointed ears. His eyes are almost black and the silvery sword he wears at his hip is probably a mageblade. He's giving all of you a once-over as he speaks, but his dark eyes have an unfocused look that makes it feel like he's looking right through you.

"The parties I represent are not interested in retribution against you, but they do require information about the individuals who hired you for the run. I have been authorized to reward you if you cooperate. If you withhold information and try to shield your former employers, I have orders to punish you." His eyes seem to come back into focus on your faces and he gives you a slow smile that says that he knows he's got you where he wants you.

"You need only answer a simple question," the elf says. "Who hired you and why do they want this?" And he holds up the key.

HOOKS

This encounter introduces the runners to Silverblade and his Ghosts in a more relaxed setting than the melee outside the Underworld 93. If the runners listen to Silverblade and cooperate with him, they might make something of an ally of the elf. If not, they make one more enemy.

BEHIND THE SCENES

This encounter assumes that the runners had the key with them when the Ghosts caprured them. If not, Silverblade questions the runners about where they have stashed the key before he begins asking about their employer.

The Ghosts have taken the runners to one of the Ghosts' safe houses in Seattle (most likely the safe house is located in the Barrens, but the gamemaster may select any suitable location for it). The runners awaken to discover that the Ghosts have bound their hands and feet with tough plastic restraints; breaking out of the restraints requires 3 or more successes on a Strength (8) Test. Magician characters awaken not only restrained, but with Ghosts standing over them, holding monoknives perilously close to their exposed necks. Silverblade keeps a close eye on such characters and makes it clear that any attempt to use magic will get them killed.

Silverblade questions the runners, using his quickened analyze truth spell to double-check their responses. Initially he assumes that "we-don't-know-what-you're-talking-about" answers are simply feeble lies that the runners are telling to protect their employer, although he is puzzled that none of these statements triggers his analyze truth spell. He will continue to question the runners carefully, attempting to trip them up or catch them in a lie. If the runners stick to their story of not knowing anything about the shadowrun, he reaches out and briefly touches one of the runners on the forehead. Any attempts to stop him are met with force from his Ghost guards. Silverblade then casts a mind probe spell to verify what the runners have told him. After a moment he curses in Sperethiel and briefly speaks to one of the other Ghosts.

After he has cast the mind probe spell, Silverblade tells the runners that their memories have been permanently erased by exposure to the drug laés. He then offers them a deal. If they help him identify who hired them to transport the key to Seattle, he will allow the runners to keep whatever money they earned from the job and give them amnesty for the smuggling incident.

If the runners accept Silverblade's offer, the elf insists that the runners swear an elven blood oath that they will perform this run to the best of their abilities and not betray Tir Tairngire's interests in the matter. The ritual consists of making a shallow cut across the palm and a declaring an oath of loyalty to Silverblade for the duration of the run. The other Ghosts are somewhat taken aback at Silverblade's request, and they show some distaste at the thought of barbarians like the player characters being allowed to partake of such a ritual. The blood oath is merely a social convention among the Ghosts and has no actual binding power over the runners—but don't tell that to the players.

If the runners refuse the elf's request or Silverblade already has learned the information by interrogating Bono, the elf lets the runners go but says he cannot assure their safety and warns them to stay out of the matter. He delivers the veiled threat in a cool, even tone that makes it clear he means it.

DEBUGGING

Starting a fight with the Tir Ghosts is the only way the runners can seriously disrupt the adventure in this encounter. If they do,

either judge the dice rolls to keep the runners out of serious trouble or let the chips fall where they may. (Serves 'em right for trying to shoot their way out of an unwinnable situation.) If you choose the second option, remember that the Ghosts do not want the runners dead. Once subdued, the runners should be more than willing to talk—but Silverblade may no longer offer them amnesty for smuggling.

If the runners managed to elude the Ghosts in earlier encounters or if they escape from captivity before Silverblade can interrogate them, the elf (or his replacement) continues to track them and employs considerably more aggressive tactics.

If the runners turn down Silverblade's job offer, the elf will show them no mercy whatsoever if he encounters them again.

In any case, proceed to **Deadly Nightshade, p. 47**

DEADLY NIGHTSHADE

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

You've been having a lot of luck so far—all of it bad. Your street contacts can't tell you a thing about what's going on. It's peculiar, considering the interest in you that certain people have been showing. Nobody seems to know—or is willing to talk about—your run and the strange key. And that can mean only one thing—someone wants to keep the whole thing very, very quiet.

As you're leaving yet another dead-end interview with a contact, you experience the same unpleasant thought that's been running through your head the past few days: if someone really wants this whole affair buried, it would make sense for them to come and bury you sooner or later.

Suddenly your eye catches a glint of chrome from a high place where no chrome should be. The world seems to stop for a moment as your reflexes kick into overdrive. Gotta be more careful about what you're thinking, chummer—sometimes nightmares come true.

HOOKS

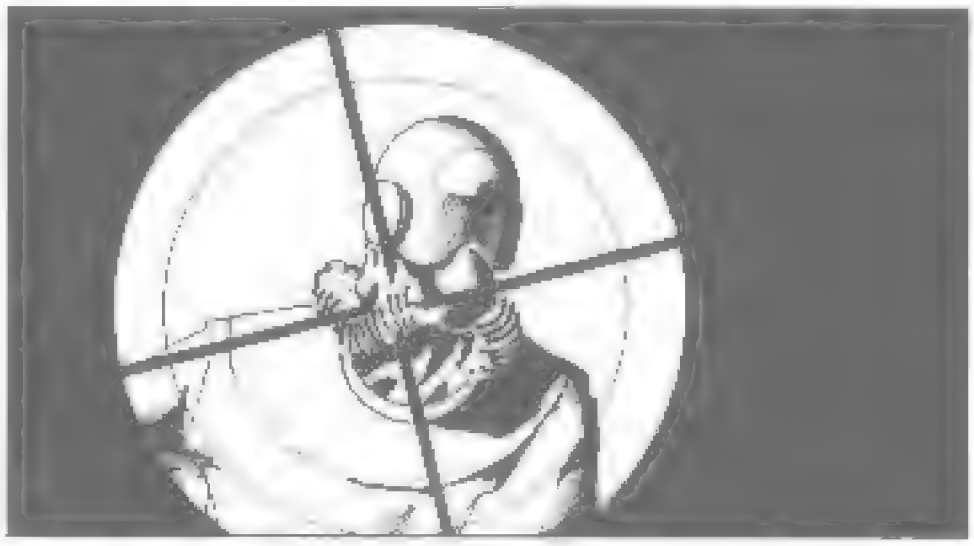
In **Deadly Nightshade**, an Aztechnology assassin takes a shot at the runners, giving them a hint about just how big a thing they're involved in (just in case they haven't already started to figure it out). This encounter primarily provides an opportunity to crank up the tension/suspense knob for the players and make them realize that they have stumbled into something serious—something that they are not going to get out of easily. Start the scene off quickly and maintain a rapid pace until the end.

BEHIND THE SCENES

Aztechnology agents in Portland learned of the key's disappearance and decided to take advantage of the theft and take the artifact themselves. To carry out the mission, the corporation has assigned the hit woman known as Belladonna (for Belladonna's statistics, see **Cast of Shadows**, p. 51). She has orders to eliminate the runners, the Ghosts, Bono or anyone else who gets in the way.

Belladonna has been trailing the runners for some time when **Deadly Nightshade** begins. She has taken a position on top of a nearby building that provides good view of the building where the runners are. When they leave, she aims her sniper rifle and draws a bead on the most dangerous-looking runner. Then fate intervenes on the runners' behalf (she must owe them one by now, don't you think?). One of the characters spots the sniper as described in **Tell It To Them Straight**. If the runners take any action to get out of the way, the first shot misses them cleanly.

After that, all bets are off and the runners are on their own. Belladonna tends to hold her actions during combat and waits until suitable targets present themselves, so the runners must be very careful or they are going to end up dead. Provide several



parked cars and perhaps a ferrocrete street-corner data terminal behind which the runners can take cover. Belladonna takes any clear shots that opportunity presents. If the runners seem too well covered or if things drag out long enough that Lone Star might show up, she makes her way to the opposite side of the building and down its fire escape (or down a rope ladder left there for that purpose). Then she gets into her waiting car and drives off.

If the runners manage to capture Belladonna alive, they find her extremely resistant to interrogation. (Add 4 to the runners' Interrogation Test target numbers if they question her.)

If she eludes capture or the runners kill her, they find no clues about her identity or her employer. Belladonna carries no identification and any money on her person is in the form of a certified credstick. If the runners kill Belladonna, Aztechnology assumes they are tougher than previously thought and continues to send various hit men against them, culminating in the showdown described in **Good Night, Gracie**, p. 48. The Big A has a long memory and it won't want word to get out that a bunch of dirk-eating shadowrunners offed one of its best operatives.

DEBUGGING

Keep in mind that this encounter is primarily intended to give the runners an idea of how big the game is that they are playing—not to slaughter them. Be fair when running Belladonna; play her as an intelligent opponent who has only basic information about the runners. Reward intelligent planning and action by the runners with success—and any foolishness with a wound or two. If the runners try something really stupid, such as a frontal assault on Belladonna, at least one of them is likely to end up dead—something you might warn them about if they consider such action.

If Belladonna begins to decimate the runners, provide them with some additional help in the form of a bystander who happens to be a mage or an off-duty Knight Errant security guard. Or simply have Lone Star respond unusually fast, forcing Belladonna and the runners to flee the scene.

GOOD NIGHT, GRACIE

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

You arrive at the prearranged meet site with your paranoia turned up as high as it will go (which isn't hard to do after the past few days). You'd still like to figure out a way to get some nuyen out of this whole thing, but right now you'd mostly like to get out of this mess with your skin intact. You're ready for anything at this point—every shadow could contain trouble. You check around to make sure everything is as it seems before you start looking for your contact. Hopefully he'll be able to explain a little of this before everything goes down.

HOOKS

This is the climatic ending scene, where all of the parties involved collide and the runners have to figure out whose side—if any—they are on. Keep the tension building throughout the encounter. The runners may have a chance to defuse the situation if they are very careful, or the scene may explode into a huge fight that wraps up the adventure.

BEHIND THE SCENES

In this encounter, the shadowrunners meet with Nicholas Grace, the Illuminate mage who hired them through Bono in the first place. Using a prearranged message drop, Bono has arranged the meet to give the runners an opportunity to deliver the key—which at least will get Bono off the hook with the Illuminates of the New Dawn. The runners may select the meeting site. All of the concerned parties are less likely to cause trouble in a public location, but a public meeting is also more likely to attract unwanted attention. If the runners do not specify a meeting site, Grace arranges to meet in an abandoned area of the Barrens, a choice that ensures privacy. (If Bono was killed by the Ghosts in **Bono Knows**, assume that Nicholas Grace managed to track the runners down and arrange this meet on his own.)

Once the runners show up, Grace instructs them to hand over the key and he will turn over the agreed-on payment: 8,000 nuyen per runner. This "Grace" is actually a human flunky disguised with a mask spell sustained by the real Grace, who is concealed in a nearby hiding place and using a clairvoyance spell to watch the proceedings. If the real Grace decides that the runners are trying to double-cross him (a conclusion he is likely to reach if he spots the Tir Ghosts or any Aztechnology hit men lurking around), the mage attempts to flee while several hired mercenaries cover him. Supply Grace with enough mercenaries to make things interesting; use the Mercenary archetype statistics on p. 58, **SRII**.

Speren Silverblade and the Tir Ghosts show up at the scene as well. If the runners are working with the Ghosts at this point, the Ghosts attempt to capture Grace for interrogation. If the runners have eluded the Ghosts up to this point, the Ghosts want to recover the key and capture (or kill) everyone involved in its theft—both the runners and Grace. The runners' previous relations with the Ghosts' determine whether the two groups help or target one another in any fight that may break out.

In addition, at least one Aztechnology assassin appears at the scene and attempts to recover the key. If Belladonna survived her encounter with the runners in **Deadly Nightshade**, she represents Aztechnology. If the runners killed or otherwise incapacitated her another hit man shows up in her place. If desired, the gamemaster can really ratchet up the battle by backing up Bella or her replacement with several Aztechnology mercenaries.

HANDING OVER THE KEY

None of the interested parties—Tir Tairngire, the Illuminates of the New Dawn, or Aztechnology—really cares about the fate of the shadowrunners. Each party is primarily interested in the key. If the runners try to turn the key over to one party or another, the others do whatever they can to prevent it and secure the key for themselves. Each party makes an offer to the runners for the key and tries to convince the runners that it can protect them from the other factions.

The players decide to whom (if anyone) they give the key. Once the key is out of the characters' hands, the other factions will lose interest in the runners. Until then, however, the situation remains very tense.

If Silverblade has already acquired the key, this encounter represents his attempt to capture the runners' employer, Nicholas Grace. However, if Grace should escape the encounter with the help of his illusory proxy, Silverblade returns to Tir Tairngire with the key.

DEBUGGING

This encounter can get very messy very quickly. Keep in mind that all of the parties are really interested only in the key (though Silverblade also wants to root out any threat to Tir Tairngire, of course). If the runners still have the key, they should be able to play the various sides against each other long enough to figure out a plan of action. If the Ghosts have already recovered the key, Aztechnology will have no interest in the meeting and Grace will attempt to escape as soon as he realizes that the jig is up.

The key is virtually indestructible, but the runners can hide it and use their knowledge of its location as a bargaining chip when dealing with the various groups. The gamemaster determines the potential success of any such plan and must improvise the reactions of the parties.

If the runners play their cards right, give them a chance to get out of trouble without a single shot being fired. If they do not—or if you are simply looking for a big bang-bang ending to the adventure—have everyone haul out the heavy ordnance and go to it.

PICKING UP THE PIECES

The runners' memories of the trip to Portland cannot be restored through any known means. If necessary, gamemasters may develop some new technological or magical treatment that enables their players to recover their memories of the run. Alternatively, gamemasters can use the players' memory lapse as a convenient starting point for future plots. Other events not described in this adventure may have occurred during the run in Portland—events that can come back and haunt the players during any slow point in a campaign.

As a result of the events in **Strange Attraction,** the Tir Ghosts and Aztechnology will keep tabs on the runners. In subsequent adventures, have the runners' contacts occasionally mention that Ghost agents and Big A operatives have been making inquiries about them. If the runners double-crossed Nicholas Grace and he survived, the mage will likely seek revenge in later adventures. In addition, the Illuminates of the New Dawn place the runners' names on their blacklist. Have members of the organization run in across the player characters every now and then and attempt to kill them or generally make their lives miserable. If Rozilyn Hernandez should become president, she will likely throw some good old government harassment at the runners. In any case, no one knows much about the Illuminates of the New Dawn or why the key is so important to them.

The key itself disappears from sight, regardless of which group recovers it.

AWARDING KARMA

Award team Karma as indicated below. Award individual Karma for good roleplaying, skill use, and so on per standard rules (p. 199, **SRII**):

Survival	1
Threat	2
Holding on to the key for the whole adventure	1
Keeping Bono alive	1

LEGWORK

In between defying attempts to capture or kill them, the runners will undoubtedly try to find out what the frag is going on. This section presents guidelines for the information they can obtain by meeting with contacts and making the appropriate Etiquette Tests.

Generally, people are reluctant to talk about the Tir Ghosts, orichalcum keys and the Illuminates of the New Dawn, so apply a +2 target number modifier to all Etiquette Tests the characters make to get information about those subjects. Play up this reluctance—make it seem as if the runners can't get the truth from their own mothers. Force them to call in every favor and/or spread around big nuyen to get the simplest piece of information.

THE GHOSTS

Appropriate Contacts (Target Number 4)

Any elf or Government contact

Successes	Result
1	"Ghosts? They don't exist, chummer. They're just a myth."
2	"The Ghosts are Tir special forces, like the SEALs or the Wildcats. They're almost all physical adepts—nasty buggers."
3	"The Ghost squads pretty much answer directly to the Council of Princes. They're the baddest of the bad, chummer."
4	"Word has it that some factionalism exists among the Ghosts, fueled by divided loyalties between the different Princes on the Council. Apparently it's led to problems before."

THE KEY

Appropriate Contacts (Target Number 4)

Any talismonger or other magical contact.

Successes	Result
1	"Can't say I've ever heard of anything like that."
2	"Hmm, I did hear about some kind of focus like that popping up somewhere recently Denver, maybe? Not sure."
3	"Yeah, I remember someone saying they'd seen a key like that at the Phoenix—a lore store in Denver—before the place burned down a few months back."
4	"The guy who saw this key said it looked older than God to him and that it drew its power in a funny sort of way. Never did find out what he meant by that."

NICHOLAS GRACE

Appropriate Contacts (Target Number 4)

Any magical, Media or Government contact.

Successes	Result
1	"Grace is a high-level member of the Illuminates of the New Dawn, the same group that Roz Hernandez belongs to."
2	"Old Nicky is a major mojo-slinger, big-time initiate. He's also an armchair politician like most of the members of his order. Bet he's looking forward to a Cabinet appointment or something if Roz gets the top spot."
3	"Word has it that Grace backs Hernandez all the way, but that he's something of a radical when it comes to mages being better than mundane folk. He seems to think that everyone should be looking to the spellworms for answers now that the world has woken up. Sounds like a lot of his Illuminate buddies agree with him, too."

CAST OF SHADOWS

The NPCs below appear in order of their importance to the story, with the exception of Beaumont Noble and Nicholas Grace, whose positions are reversed.

SPEREN SILVERBLADE

Speren Silverblade is a special agent of the Council of Princes and a loyal citizen of Tir Tairngire. He truly believes that elves are superior to other metahumans, a conceit that causes him to condescend to characters of non-elven metatypes. He thinks that elves are the "caretakers" of the world and have a duty to prevent humans, orks, trolls, and dwarfs from messing things up. A skilled magician and trained fighter, Silverblade prefers stealth and subtlety to direct confrontation and sheer firepower.

The elf treats the shadowrunners as he feels is proper for a man of his noble nature and station. He shows them considerable mercy (by his definition) as long as they are useful to him in some way. If the runners cross him or their usefulness ends, Silverblade treats them no better than any other scum who get in his way.

Silverblade doesn't know the key's true nature. He knows only that his mentors consider it of the utmost importance, and that is enough for him. He puts his mission first. Everything else, including the lives of others, is secondary.

Attributes

Body: 5
Quickness: 6
Strength: 4
Charisma: 5
Intelligence: 5
Willpower: 6
Essence: 6
Magic: 9
Reaction: 5

Skills

Armed Combat (Blade Weapons): 6
Car: 4
Conjuring: 5
Etiquette (Elf): 5
Firearms: 5
Interrogation: 6
Leadership: 5
Magic Theory: 4
Sorcery: 6
Stealth: 5
Unarmed Combat: 6

Initiative: 5 + 3D6
Threat/Professional Rating: 6/3
Initiate Grade: 3

Spells

Combat
Mana Dart: 6
Sleep: 5
Health
Increase Reflexes +2: 3 (6*)
Paralyze: 4
Treat: 2
Manipulation
Bind: 4
Magic Fingers: 3
Personal Bullet Barrier: 5
Detection
Analyze Truth: 3*
Clairvoyance: 2
Enhance Aim: 4*
Mind Probe: 3
Personal Combat Sense: 4*
Illusion
Chaotic World: 4
Disregard: 3
Mask: 3
Silence: 4

*Quickened at the listed Force.

Gear

Crusader Machine Pistol (40 (clip), SA/BF, 6L)
"Argentine," a silver-chased long sword (stacked Rating 4 Power/Weapon Focus)
Armored Long Coat over form-fitting Body Armor (total 5/3)
Vashon Island Mirror Shades
2 Smoke Grenades

BELLADONNA

The mysterious Belladonna is the perfect weapon for a corp like Aztechnology. She walks on the razor's edge, a huntress who lives for the thrill of the hunt and the kill in the depths of the urban jungle that she calls home. Belladonna is a "personal assistant" to a high-ranking Aztechnology executive and handles all kinds of troubleshooting for her corporate masters. She has received so many cyberware implants that she's barely human (though she is not cybermantic—yet). A highly efficient fighter and killer, she likes to toy with her prey when possible to extend the pleasure of her hunt.

Belladonna's cyberware implants include full-replacement limbs, increased reflexes, hand razors and cybereyes. The chrome of her cyberware lends an exotic air to her stunning appearance, which she enhances with a carefully selected wardrobe.

Attributes

Body: 5 (7)
Quickness: 6 (9)
Strength: 5 (8)
Charisma: 5
Intelligence: 5
Willpower: 6
Essence: 1.26
Reaction: 7 (11) + 3D6

Skills

Armed Combat: 6
Athletics: 5
Cyberweapons: 8
Etiquette (Corporate): 3
Etiquette (Street): 5
Firearms: 7
Seduction: 6
Stealth: 8
Unarmed Combat: 8

Initiative: 7 (11) + 3D6
Threat/Professional Rating: 6/4

Cyberware (beta grade)

Cyberarms (2) with Strength +3, Quickness +3, Hand Razors and Smartgun Link II
Cybereyes with Low-Light and Thermographic
Cyberlegs (2) with Strength +3, Quickness +3
Datajack
Oral Spur
Wired Reflexes (2)

Gear

Armor Jacket over form-fitting Body Armor (6/4 total armor)
Colt Manhunter (Heavy Pistol, 16 (clip), SA, 9M, w/ 1 extra clip)
Ranger Arms Sniper Rifle (SA, 14S, 40 rounds)
Throwing Spikes (8L Damage (concealed in various places on her person and tipped with a neuro-stun toxin that does 6S Stun damage if a spike inflicts a Light wound or worse))

In addition to the listed gear, Aztechnology supplies Belladonna with almost any equipment she requests for her assignments—usually within hours of her request.

BEAUMONT NOBLE

Bono, as he is known on the streets, is a fixer of some repute who's had the bad fortune to involve himself in the plots of the Illuminates of the New Dawn. He is a low-class, small-time character for the most part, but he knows a valuable deal when he sees one. He sometimes lets his greed get the better of him, but in general he's a fair dealer and a decent contact who has simply gotten in over his head on this one. During the adventure he has a tendency to whine and ask a lot of needless questions because he feels so out of his element. All Bono wants is to have everyone off his back and to get back to business as usual—and maybe make some nuyen out of the whole deal if he's lucky.

Attributes

Body: 2
Strength: 2
Quickness: 3
Intelligence: 5
Willpower: 5
Charisma: 3
Essence: 2.5
Reaction: 4

Initiative: 4 + 1D6
Threat/Professional Rating: 2/2

Skills

Computer: 3
Electronics: 3
Etiquette (Street): 6
Evaluate Goods: 6
Firearms: 2
Interrogation: 4
Negotiation: 7

Cyberware

Cybereyes
Datajack
Display Link
Headware Memory (300 Mp)

Gear

Armor Clothing (3/0)
Colt America L36 (Light Pistol, 11 (clip), SA, 6L, w/Laser Sight)
Pocket Secretary

Attributes

Body: 3
Quickness: 5
Strength: 2
Charisma: 5
Intelligence: 6
Willpower: 6
Essence: 6
Magic: 10
Reaction: 5

Skills

Conjuring: 6
Enchanting: 6
Etiquette (Magical): 5
Etiquette (Political): 4
Gesture (Centering): 6
History: 5
Leadership: 2
Magic Theory: 6
Political Theory: 4
Sorcery: 7

Initiative: 5 + 2D6
Threat/Professional Rating: 5/3
Initiate Grade: 4

Gear

Armor Clothing (3/0)
Gold and copper amulet (Anchoring Item with a Force 6 personal barrier spell linked to a Force 3 detect bullet spell. The barrier spell has a total duration of about 2 minutes remaining; the detection spell will last for seven at more days).
Silver ring set with an amethyst (Power Focus 3)

Spells

Combat
Ram: 5
Sleep: 6
Spirit Bolt: 5
Health
Decrease Willpower (-3): 5
Heal: 4
Increase Reflexes (+1): 4 (6*)
Paralyze: 4
Preserve: 2
Manipulation
Animate: 4
Control Thoughts: 6
Firewall: 6
Fling: 5
Levitate Item: 6
Magic Fingers: 3
Mental Shield: 4*
Mob Mind: 6
Personal Barrier: 9
Spell Barrier: 6
Transform: 5

Detection
Analyze Device: 3
Analyze Truth: 3
Clairvoyance (Extended): 4
Detect Bullet: 3
Foretelling: 4
Translate: 3
Illusion
Physical Mask: 5
Spectacle: 3

*Quickened at the listed Force

NICHOLAS GRACE

A mage and initiate of the Illuminates of the New Dawn, Grace is a contemporary of Rozilyn Hernandez and is almost fanatically devoted to her. He sees Hernandez as something of a messiah figure and believes that she can lead the UCAS into a new age of prosperity in which mundane society will respect magicians for their superior knowledge and abilities, rather than scorning and fearing them.

He truly believes that a Hernandez presidency is needed to transform the UCAS into a stable and happy society, and he is willing to do whatever is necessary to ensure that happens—including taking actions that his mentor might not consider entirely ethical. During his research he has discovered the existence of a legendary magical item that might allow him to make sure his dreams come true. That item is the orichalcum key around which **Strange Attraction** turns.

Slim and bookish, Grace wears glasses rather than undergoing corneal surgery and risking adverse effects to his magical abilities. Despite his modest appearance, he is a skilled initiate mage who can command a great deal of power. When using magic, he centers himself by tracing strange, faintly glowing arcane diagrams in the air with elaborate hand and arm gestures. He maintains five bound elementals at all times—two earth elementals and one each of the other elements, all at Force 5.

JAMES BOOTH ⊕ FRANKLIN YEATS

JAMES BOOTH
PARTY AFFILIATION: TECHNOCRATIC
"RESTORE THE FUTURE"

>>>>>(Because these guys debated each other, I'm linking their bios (such as they are) together for contrast, followed by the results of the town meeting. I couldn't find much beyond campaign fluff and PR puff, so keep your eyes wide open as you read.

The following is excerpted from a transcript of Booth's campaign video—he gives his speech in voiceover, over various inspirational moments and scenes (yarrghh). It's good for a chuckle, if not much else.)<<<<<

—Captain Chaos (11:54.12/02-12-57)

VALUES MATTER MOST

[Video: Main Street of small New England town, the Booth family home, young Jimmy Booth accepting a "School Spirit" award from his fifth-grade teacher.]

"I was born and raised in a small New England town—just outside Providence, Rhode Island—and very early in my life I learned that the most important thing in the world is other people. Family, friends ... the grocer down the block, the druggist around the corner, the pretty fifth-grade schoolteacher who all the kids brought apples to ... all these people meant something to me as a kid, and taught me that being a good neighbor is the highest virtue we can achieve. I've never lost sight of that lesson. Throughout my life, wherever my fortunes have taken me, I've kept that small-town sense that everyone is my neighbor. All that's happened is, my "neighborhood" has gotten bigger.

[Video: Brown University campus, candidate listening attentively in class, chairing meeting of fraternity brothers.]

"When I went to college at Brown University, my neighborhood became first my freshman class, and then—as I got used to living in a place so much bigger and more complicated than my sleepy little hometown—the whole campus. I was a founding member of FADR—Fraternities Against Drunk Rigging—because I wanted to give something back to the community that was giving me a fine education. And since I began my professional life, every year I've contributed whatever I could afford to the Alumni Fund for underprivileged students. They're my neighbors too, you see, even though they and I are different in many ways.

[Video: Candidate as young lawyer conferring seriously with several men and women in suits; statue of justice prominent in background. Candidate posing with beaming couple outside spiffy new storefront, reading bedtime story to his daughter.]

"I went into corporate law because I wanted to help the little guy against the kind of corporate behemoth that always seems to have the money and power to mow down anyone in its way. Now I know that might sound a little strange to some people, but I truly believed—and still believe—that the best way to change a system that isn't working is to do it from the inside. Learning the ins and outs of corporate law and meeting corporate movers and shakers face to face allowed me to do that. I learned which businessmen and CEOs had the welfare of their employees and communities at heart, and also which few did not. Throughout my legal career I've tried to help the former and hinder the latter, and I think my record speaks for itself.

[Video: Candidate running jauntily up steps of Capitol building, posing with President Adams in front of podium with presidential seal on it, looking solemn at presidential funeral.]

"After fifteen years at Benton & Glakowicz, I left the law firm to lobby for responsible corporate regulation in the District of Columbia. I had already learned quite a bit about the ins and outs of corporate politics, and I put that knowledge to good use in the service of an even larger neighborhood—the nation. In 2051, President Adams appointed me Secretary of State, a post I was honored to accept. Unfortunately, within a year tragedy struck—and I was called on to serve my country in a way I had never expected. President Adams suffered a massive stroke in late 2052; his vice president became Acting President according to Constitutional law, and I was asked to fill the vice presidential office. I have done so ably and well for the past four years. I believe I know where this great nation of ours should be headed—and how to lead us there."

>>>>>[Booth had a hot rep as a lobbyist for corporate causes in DeeCee. Word has it he wasn't above using the shadows to convince Joe Politico to take his client's view of things.]<<<<<

—DC Insider (15:12:34/02-13-57)

>>>>>[Booth still has his fair share of connections in the DeeCee shadow community. A lot of people owe him favors and he's been cashing in all of his markers lately.]<<<<<

—Raker (16:04:37/02-13-57)

>>>>>[Booth really leapfrogged into power, all things considered—from lobbyist to Secretary of State to VP in just a couple of years. He's a real go-getter, and he doesn't like to lose.]<<<<<

—DC Insider (14:02:20/02-14-57)

>>>>>[I know a lot of people who think President Adams's death was conveniently timed, coming right after the election like that. The press releases blamed it on the "stress of the campaign," and nobody could prove foul play. Still, with some of the wizzer magic and tech we have these days, it could have been done without anyone the wiser. Anybody wants the real facts, contact me at NA/UCAS/NE/07926038:Cause for a complete download.]<<<<<

—Smokin' Gun (01:14:25/02-15-57)

>>>>>[Quit posting your fraggin' conspiracy theories to this board, willya, Gun?! We don't want to hear it!]<<<<<

—Bung (19:12:02/02-15-57)

>>>>>[Booth's primary goal is to distance himself from the political scandal that got him removed from office. He would love to know how the election results were rigged, and by whom. That information might let him vindicate himself in the eyes of the public and give him the boost to put him in the White House.]<<<<<

—Spinner (15:22:20/02-13-57)

>>>>>[There's a whole SIG for the discussion of the rigged election, folks, so I'm going to nip speculation about it in the bud before all you berks mess up this document with a hundred contradictory postings.]<<<<<

—Captain Chaos (15:30:06/02-13-57)

GENERAL FRANKLIN YEATS
PARTY AFFILIATION: REPUBLICAN
"RETURN TO GREATNESS"

>>>>>[This excerpt comes from an article in the *New UCAS Republic*. Despite the obvious pro-Franklin bias, I chose this piece because it had the most detail about the guy—most of the rest of what's out there is PR bromides either canonizing or demonizing him without telling us a fragging thing about his background.]<<<<<

—Captain Chaos (16:24:15/02-19-57)

AN AMERICAN HERO

If you're looking for an exemplar of the classic American success story, you can't do much better than General Franklin Yeats. From the humblest of beginnings, Franklin Yeats has risen to a position of enormous responsibility and trust, aided only by his own innate talents and unswerving loyalty to his country—first the United States of America, then the United Canadian and American States.

Franklin Yeats was born in the waning years of the last century, the youngest of five children in a humble but proud working-class family in the great Midwestern city of Chicago. Even as an elementary-school student, young Franklin showed unusual intelligence, and he graduated from high school at the top of his class. In his valedictory speech, Franklin credited his academic success to "my parents, who were always there for me when I needed them; and the example of the great men in our country's history, which proved to me that nothing is impossible if you're willing to work hard and sacrifice in order to accomplish it." Almost immediately, Franklin put that principle to work in his own life; knowing that his family could not afford to send him to college, he enlisted in the UCAS Army. In this way, he combined his own ambitions for higher education with dedicated service to his country, as he would do time and time again.

Soon after joining the Army, Franklin Yeats chose to make the military his career. Gifted, persistent and a tireless worker, he rose quickly through the ranks and learned everything he could. His talent for efficient administration brought him to the attention of the Pentagon, and he spent several years working in the District of Columbia. During this time he received a well-deserved promotion to the rank of general, and soon afterward was asked to become a member of President Preston's Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Throughout Preston's two terms in office, General Yeats distinguished himself as a lone advocate for strengthening the UCAS military. Unlike civilian officials and even many of his own colleagues, who saw only the need to save money in an era of increasing pressure to balance the federal budget, Yeats believed that stringent military cuts would ultimately harm his beloved nation far more than the small budget deficit a fully-funded military might cause. He held to his principled position despite opposition from virtually all quarters, and managed to ensure at least some degree of military readiness in the UCAS forces even in the face of major cutbacks.

JAMES BOOTH ⇔ FRANKLIN

The unprecedented political crisis of the fraudulent presidential election has brought General Yeats back onto the public scene. Like the true patriot he has always been, General Yeats declared his candidacy for the presidential office because, in his own words, "If we want the United Canadian and American States to survive, we have to elect leaders who care about something beyond their own personal ambitions. We have to elect leaders who love this country, who want to see it strong again, and who aren't afraid to make personal sacrifices to serve the nation's good. I love this country, and I am willing to shoulder the burden of leading it down the difficult road to renewal."

>>>>>(Yeats' running mate, Anne Penchyk, is a savvy ork who served two terms as UCAS Representative from Wisconsin. Before that, she ran her own marketing consultant business in Milwaukee. She's a smart spokeswoman for metahuman rights and an economic progressive; you know, the kind who goes around saying that peace and prosperity go together. She and General Yeats have been friends for years, dating back to their days in DeeCee together.)<<<<<

—Spinner (22:10:45/02-20-57)

>>>>>(Don't be misled by the "peacenik" running mate. Yeats is a hawk, pure and simple. He wants the UCAS military pumped up to what it was in the glory days of the old U.S. of A., and he's not shy about saying so. He also wants a chance to use all those neat military toys once he's got 'em.)<<<<<

—Yabo (23:14:32/02-20-57)

>>>>>(Yeats has been a "paid consultant" (read: military ops advisor) to several AAA megacorps since he retired from the army in 2054. He's got contacts with most of the Big Eight, especially Ares. He turned Aztechnology down for a job a couple of years back that apparently paid mucho dinero. Word has it that the general was asked to compromise his nation's security.)<<<<<

—Pyramid Watcher (18:20:12/02-22-57)

>>>>>(Yeats isn't too popular with anyone outside the UCAS. He's made his opinion of the Native American Nations as "terrorist criminals" very clear, and he's all but stated in the baldest terms possible that if he becomes president he plans to send the tanks rolling into CAS and CalFree. He's real big on reclaiming the "rebel" states of the old USA.)<<<<<

—Arclight (20:18:01/02-22-57)

>>>>>(Alarmist jetwash. Yeats is conservative, sure, but he's right about the UCAS not taking drek anymore from every new ten-yen country in North America that thinks it's the Chosen Land. It's about time the UCAS stood up for itself and started taking back what belongs to it.)<<<<<

—Jaxon (00:12:40/02-24-57)

>>>>>(We reclaimed what you first took from us, Anglo. You want it back, just come try for it.)<<<<<

—Irrelevant (15:17:29/02-24-57)

Unfortunately for the general and for the country he loved, he was fighting a losing battle. Ongoing social upheaval, a souring economy and the absence of a single clear enemy combined to make the military budget an even more attractive target for the bean-counters and cutters. Unable to sit by and watch as the cuts he had fought against took place, Yeats left active military service in 2054 and went to work in the private sector. For the past two years he has lived a quiet life, working as a consultant to several corporations and writing a critically acclaimed book about his experiences in the military during the harrowing formative years of the UCAS.

>>>>>(Fraggin' redskin, I'll give you what you **(1 Mp deleted by sysop)**)<<<<<
—Ixion (00:12:08/02-25-57)

>>>>>(Okay, kids. Cool down. I want real discussion here, not stupid threats. Don't make me interrupt again.)<<<<<
—Captain Chaos (00:07:01/02-26-57)

>>>>>(Lucky old Yeats happened to be on an extended trip out of Chi-town when the whole Bug City mess went down. He's been pretty vocal about how the UCAS botched up that whole affair. "There but for the grace of God go I," and all that drek.)<<<<<
—Turner (18:17:43/02-25-57)

>>>>>(Luck had nothing to do with it, chummer. Yeats has connections, in DeeCee and with the corps. He probably had plenty of warning that something bad was gonna go down in Chicago long before it happened, and knew enough to get out.)<<<<<
—DC Insider (20:14:28/02-27-57)

>>>>>(Annie Penchyk's really got brass. When she got fired from a position with a successful New York advertising firm after she goblinized, the lady moved back to the Midwest and started her own very successful marketing company. Even better, she took most of her old clients with her. She fought long and hard for meta rights before and after she got elected to Congress, and stood up to death threats and worse from those Humanis fraggers. I almost wish she was going for the top slot.)<<<<<
—GoblinBoy (14:12:08/02-28-57)

>>>>>(Dare to dream, chummer. Penchyk can't make it into the Oval Office by herself—at least not yet—but hitching her star to Yeats gives her a fair shot. Maybe after a couple of terms as VP she'll have a realistic chance of landing in the Big Chair.)<<<<<
—DC Insider (20:11:14/02-28-57)

THE DEBATE

>>>>>(On February 28th, former Vice-President Booth shared a stage with General Franklin Yeats in Claremont, New Hampshire. For nearly an hour the candidates took questions from concerned citizens in a "town-meeting" format. The whole thing was widely broadcast on the newsnets. Following are excerpts from a transcript provided by the White House public-access archives.)<<<<<
—Captain Chaos (14:20:52/03-10-57)

BOOTH: When I came here only a few short months ago, the president and I believed we could turn the UCAS around. This country's standard of living is declining; our country is coming apart when we ought to be coming together. Like average UCAS citizens everywhere, I'm worried about the decline of the middle class, the growth of the underclass, high unemployment and an exploding national deficit. I'm also very worried about the breakdown of our families, the number of children growing up in poverty, and the decline in social values, mores and institutions that are important to all of us.

We need to discuss these issues openly and honestly. One of the things I like about New Hampshire, which I believe is missing in the rest of modern politics, is that most people here make their decisions based on encounters like this town meeting, which is why I hope your state will always hold the first national primary.

Now, please welcome General Yeats. Listen carefully to his opening comments, and then we'll begin to answer questions.

YEATS: I'm very happy to be here. I am grateful that you all have allowed me to come and speak with you today, and I hope we can talk honestly about doing something good for our country.

And I agree with Mr. Booth about the New Hampshire town-meeting tradition where you can ask questions, we can talk to each other, and no one is limited to 9- or 15-second sound bites and clever advertisements. I think the sense of community symbolized by your being here is something we've gotten away from that we desperately need to revive. Hopefully, by watching tonight's proceedings the country can learn a little bit about working together and addressing real issues, not just buying up commercial time to attack each other. Again, thank you for giving us your time this evening.

THE ECONOMY

Q: The economy—I mean, we're all worried about it. What's going to happen to our jobs? Are we going to be able to take care of our families? I don't really care about all the other drek, just tell me if we can expect to see more jobs.

BOOTH: Ma'am, you've identified the key issue for everyone. Economic recovery has to be priority one for our nation, because if we don't have a healthy economy and a population capable of supporting itself, we're not going to be able to accomplish the other things on our list. Innovation and technological development must be encouraged and corporate cooperation secured to insure the economic success of the nation. The UCAS needs to offer corporations incentives to put their resources into revitalizing the nation's job market and offering new products and services to consumers.

YEATS: While I agree with Mr. Booth that economic recovery should be our first priority, we need more efficient management of the nation's resources. The waste that goes on in our government is appalling; all that wasteful spending must be reined in before our political leaders bleed the nation dry. If the UCAS was a business, it would have gone bankrupt a long time ago. We need an economic policy that's lean and mean, one that will allow every UCAS citizen to contribute to the country's well-being and make the best use of the nation's resources. Only by working together as one can we gain the prosperity that we seek.

CALIFORNIA

Q: Mr. Booth, during the '56 election the question of reunification with California came up several times. Has your position on this issue changed?

BOOTH: My position on California has not changed. Stronger diplomatic ties with nations like California and the Confederate American States are important, but they should take second place to addressing our own country's internal problems. Eventually I would like to see improved diplomatic and trade relations with the California Free State, but anything more than that will be a slow and delicate process.

YEATS: The UCAS is the heart and soul of the old United States and Canada, and we have a duty to bring its scattered people together as a whole once again. As Benjamin Franklin said at the American Constitutional Convention of 1787: "We must all hang together, or we will surely hang separately." California can be a partner in the revitalization of our nation, and we can help rebuild California's battered economy at the same time. Do we really want to stand idly by and let the Japanese gut California, or do we want to start rebuilding our once-great nation by welcoming our errant sister state back into the fold?

CHICAGO

Q: My sister lives in Chicago and I haven't been able to contact her for months. I don't even know for sure if she's dead or alive. I want to know what the frag the government plans to do about this mess!

YEATS: Chicago is a tragic example of what happens when we let military manpower slide simply to shave a dollar here and there. Military units were moved to the city as quickly as possible when reports of the insect-spirit outbreak first came through, but so many troops were required to enforce the quarantine that no personnel can yet be spared to rescue the innocent civilians trapped in the Containment Zone. If we had a larger army with better equipment to deal with these crises, we might have achieved some resolution by now. The Chicago catastrophe is also a sad commentary on our nation's control of its magical practitioners. The uncontrolled use of magic caused this crisis in the first place; had the UCAS government been willing to enforce stricter measures concerning the licensing and use of magic, the whole thing might never have happened.

BOOTH: The situation in Chicago is very delicate. We're dealing with several unknowns in containing this disaster, and so we must move cautiously. I truly sympathize with your plight, and that of all of the people in the Chicago Containment Zone. We need quick and decisive leadership to bring this matter to a swift conclusion.

The deployment of UCAS troops outside the Containment Zone has stretched our military assets very thin. I agree with General Yeats; our military as it stands is simply not up to dealing with crises of this magnitude. I also agree that we need to ensure a strong domestic defense for our nation in order to prevent another disaster like Chicago from happening elsewhere. However, I don't believe we should be spending vast amounts of our scarce revenues to beef up the military when we have other options—for example, hiring private security forces that can handle emergencies on a case-by-case basis at a fraction of the cost. I'm a strong supporter of maintaining a fit military for our own defense, but I feel your tax dollars are better spent on rebuilding our infrastructure and revitalizing our economy. We should reap the peace dividend of our treaties with the other North American powers rather than spend ourselves into bankruptcy preparing for more conflict.

YEATS: I'm afraid Mr. Booth is ignoring the fact that revitalizing our military can also boost the economy. Military contracts produce plenty of well-paying jobs, and a larger military will also give more of our nation's young people a chance to serve their country. As a young man in Chicago, I took the opportunity to better myself through military service; why shouldn't others have the same chance that I had? We've forgotten the value of service in this day and age; we need to rediscover it if we hope to regain real prosperity.

RACIAL EQUALITY

Q: As a dwarf, I'd like to know what each of your positions are on the question of equal rights for metahumans.

YEATS: I've had the opportunity to serve with a number of metahumans during my active-duty years, and I respect them immensely as fellow officers. I think we all too often forget that we're all the same under the skin; we're all part of a greater community. My running mate has made a career out of fighting for the rights of her fellow metahumans, and both Anne and I support equal rights for all citizens of the UCAS.

BOOTH: All citizens of the UCAS already have equal rights under law. That is part of our Constitution. We simply need to put programs in place to ensure that current law is enforced to the fullest, without resorting to burdensome new legislation.

FOREIGN POLICY

Q: What about the demands of some other North American nations? How are you going to deal with those?

BOOTH: I think my record in international affairs speaks for itself. I played an instrumental role in opening more cordial relations with our neighbor nations, especially the Native American Nations and the Confederate American States. The UCAS has been isolated among the nations of North America for far too long; it's high time we took our place as the elder statesman and provided our neighbors with the example of liberty and democracy on which both America and Canada were founded.

YEATS: The UCAS must rebuild its military, because you can't have a credible foreign policy without a strong defense. If we no longer want to be pushed around by other nations, we need the strength to back up our "elder statesman" status. National defense must be among our most important concerns, because there can be no prosperity without safety.

CASUALTIES OF WAR: A PROLOGUE

Corporal Robert Finn didn't like bugs. His friends kidded him about it all the time, that a big tough guy like Rob was scared of something as small as a roach or a wasp. But Finn wasn't afraid of them, exactly, just ... they weirded him out. Bugs were disgusting ... gross. They made his skin crawl and his insides go cold.

So naturally, Fate had seen fit to put him in a guard tower watching over the biggest nest of giant bugs in the fragging universe, the Chicago Containment Zone. "Bug City," everyone called it. The perfect place for a guy like him. The section of the city infested by the bug spirits lay behind the Wall—a makeshift barricade of demolished buildings reinforced with fences, razor-wire, guard towers and soldiers like Finn manning machine guns. Nobody got in or out except for military patrol and supply runs. Finn felt sorry for all the civilians trapped inside the Zone, but he understood the harsh reality behind the Army's decision to leave them there. They just couldn't take the risk of the bugs getting outside.

A glimmer of movement on the Wall caught Finn's eye and he shivered, fearing it might be a bug. He still hadn't seen one, but he knew they were out there. Other guys in his squad had told him horror stories about nests of roach, ant and wasp spirits as big as cars. He swung the tower's spotlight over for a look and tapped his buddy Chuck O'Leary on the shoulder.

The blazing beam of the searchlight illuminated a small group of people clambering over the Wall. "Breakout!" said Chuck, and reached for the bullhorn.

Thrasher knew getting outside the Wall wouldn't be easy, especially with some news-snoop biff trailing along. He glanced back at the woman—Mara Suhar, she'd said her name was. Thrasher shook his head as Suhar slipped on a loose piece of plascrete. Frag the biff, she was slowing them down.

The spotlight on the tower swung around, pinning them in its bright circle of light. Thrasher knew they were right in the kill zone of the guards' machine guns.

"Move it!" he yelled, and scrambled toward the light's edge. He swore silently as he moved, knowing that he'd never reach the shadows in time.

Finn picked out two men and two women picking their way down the slope of the Wall toward freedom. One of them yelled as soon as the spotlight hit them; then they all started running, scrambling down the Wall. He glanced over at Chuck, who nodded. Finn swung the machine gun to cover the fugitives.

"THIS IS THE UCAS MILITARY," Chuck's voice boomed from the bullhorn. "STAND WHERE YOU ARE OR WE WILL OPEN FIRE!"

The figures kept moving. "Give 'em a warning shot, Finn," Chuck said, and Finn squeezed the trigger. The whole tower seemed to rattle as the burst stitched the dirt just in front of the fleeing figures, sending up small clouds of dust and chips of plascrete.

"THIS IS YOUR LAST WARNING," the bullhorn thundered. "HALT NOW, OR WE WILL USE DEADLY FORCE. THIS IS YOUR LAST WARNING."

Finn looked at his buddy, startled. "Chuck, we're supposed to fire warning flares before using d-force—"

Chuck lowered the bullhorn. "Finn, they're already over the fraggin Wall! We should've shot them as soon as they showed up on the far side. Do it!"

Finn bit his lip, then swung the machine gun back on target. "Wait a minute. They're stopping, Chuck!"

"It could be a trick. Keep 'em covered."

"Are we supposed to take them prisoner?" Finn asked.

Chuck shook his head. "Orders are, no one leaves the CZ and no contact with anyone from inside. We should fraggin shoot 'em right now."

"In cold blood?" Finn's voice shot up an octave, like a kid with the breaks.

"That's orders, *corporal*," Chuck said, walking up to the machine gun. "Or do I have to do it myself?"

Thrasher stood next to his chummer Raven, his skin crawling with terrified anticipation. Any second now, he expected a hail of bullets to cut them down. Meanwhile, he'd use whatever time the

guards gave him to find some way to pull everyone's fat out of the fire. "Raven, can you get a line on the tower? Toss something good at it, maybe?"

Raven nodded, squinting her dark eyes against the glare. "I think there's a shot. Let me—"

"That won't be necessary," said the reporter biff suddenly. She smiled at them both. "In fact, *you* are no longer necessary."

"Shut up and let us—holy drek!" Thrasher watched in horror as the slim, dark form of Mara Suhar melted away. In her place stood a glistening green-and-black insect, three meters tall. The creature unfolded its long arms toward them, edged with sharp spikes.

Finn couldn't tear his eyes from the horrible, beautiful sight of the huge insect. It grabbed the woman standing near it and tore her apart like a rag doll. As he watched the woman's blood spatter over the bug's glistening carapace, he became dimly aware of Chuck O'Leary shouting something at him. "Dammit, Finn! Shoot it! SHOOT IT!"

Finn clamped down hard on the trigger and the gun roared. A rain of lead chopped into the figures below, sending them spinning to the ground—all except the bug. It coiled its spindly legs underneath it and made a single, graceful leap to the top of the tower.

"Holy bleeding frag," Chuck swore, reaching for the radio. Finn screamed as the insect's forelimbs and small, triangular head came through the tower's window. The bug grabbed Chuck and tore him and the radio apart with equal ease. Then it turned on Finn. He screamed as it reached for him—the sound choked off abruptly as one long, spike-edged limb ripped his head from his shoulders.

The insect dropped to the ground and reassumed its human form, masking its aura from the astral snoopers that would soon arrive. Mara Suhar climbed quickly down the Wall, moving as swiftly as she could manage. Once well away from the scene of the carnage, she could travel more quickly. She had a message to deliver, and she didn't want to be late.

INTRODUCTION

In this adventure the shadowrunners are hired by Mara Suhar, a reporter who found a way into Bug City and managed to escape the Chicago Containment Zone with some valuable news footage, aided by a few local shadowrunners. The footage shows a human named Vincent, trapped in the Containment Zone and pleading with his sister to get him out alive. Mara wants to go back into the CZ with a few skilled companions—the runners—to rescue Vincent. Yes, it's a suicide mission, but Vincent is no ordinary Joe. Vincent is Anne Penchyk's brother—and Anne Penchyk is the running mate of UCAS presidential candidate General Franklin Yeats. If Suhar can pull off this rescue, she'll have the scoop of the century, and the possible next vice president of the UCAS will owe her big favors ... or so it seems.

The truth is, Penchyk's brother is dead—captured and transformed by the insect spirits in Chicago. Mara Suhar is not the dedicated reporter she appears to be—she is a female mantis spirit sent by her sisters on a special mission. The runners will find themselves caught in a double-cross inside the Containment Zone, and will have to use every trick they have ever learned just to get back out alive.

THE BUZZ

Not long before the outbreak of insect spirits in Chicago, a human mage named Kyle Teller encountered a group of mantis spirits in the guise of an all-female street gang known as the Desolation Angels. A member of the gang seduced Mitchell Truman, teenage son of simsense mogul Daniel Truman, intending to invest him with a male mantis spirit. Mitchell escaped, but was later killed by other insect spirits (see the **Shadowrun** novel **Burning Bright**).

In the months since the UCAS army set up the Chicago Containment Zone, the Desolation Angels have continued to operate within the city of Chicago, strengthening their own numbers and systematically hunting down the other insect spirits that inhabit the city. The Angels occasionally recruit strong-willed women to serve them as hosts, allowing the mantis to acquire all of the hosts' memories and abilities so that they can move more easily through human society undetected. This, along with fertile hunting grounds for human and insect prey, has allowed the circle of mantis spirits to grow strong and multiply under the leadership of a powerful female who calls herself Vixen.

The mantids in Vixen's circle are developing long-term plans for events in Chicago and beyond. One of these plans involves Anne Penchyk, whose intelligence and strength of character brought her to the Desolation Angels' attention early in the UCAS presidential race. The prospect of having such a strong-willed female in the powerful position of UCAS vice president is too good for the mantis spirits to pass up, and Ms. Penchyk's friendship with General Franklin Yeats is vital in furthering the mantids ultimate goals. The mantids have therefore recruited Anne Penchyk, and she is actively working with them on getting the mantids out of the Containment Zone so that they can freely expand their influence.

Mara Suhar recently escaped the Containment Zone and contacted Anne Penchyk. Her orders were to get from Penchyk any information regarding the movement of troops around the perimeter of Bug City, or anything else that will allow Vixen and the others to leave their walled prison. She is also a major player in the plan to smuggle mantis spirits out of Bug City, for which she will be hiring a few good shadowrunners.

THE PLAN

Vixen, Mara and Anne devised a plan to gradually get the mantids out of the CZ, after which Anne will begin introducing them to some powerful women in the highest levels of business and government. Through her friendship with General Yeats, Anne has gained access to valid passcodes for the Containment Zone guard gate, supply drop points and military schedules. Now she must get the information to Vixen and the others in Bug City without sacrificing her position and her friends. The simplest plan called for Anne to get inside the CZ, meet with Vixen and use the passcodes within 24 hours or less. Such a brief mission makes it easier for Anne to keep the press from trying to track her down (the official word is that she's fallen ill with the flu), while still allowing her to get a good number of spirits out. The plan has its risks, but the mantis spirits are more than willing to take them to get out of the CZ. To get in and deliver the information, however, Anne and the mantids need some patsies. (That's where the shadowrunners come in.)

AN URGENT NEED

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

You've had some pretty strange meetings for shadow work before, chummers, but this is one you won't soon forget. When your contact told you a high-class client was looking for a few good shadowrunners, you knew you wouldn't be dealing with some scroffy Johnson in a cheap suit ... but somehow you didn't expect to be met at the door of a ritzy downtown hangout by a couple of big guys with dark suits, shades and that distracted "I'm-listening-to-a-radio-in-my-head" look that just screams federal agents—probably Secret Service.

The private club they've brought you to is quiet and intimate, a little too intimate to let you feel comfortable. Light jazz music wafts through the air from a real wiz sound system concealed somewhere behind the dark wood paneling; the light cast by the imitation carriage lamps glints off the polished brass fixtures, looking soft and golden. Both the music and the light seem intended to help keep conversations discreet and private. Convenient, neh?

One of the dark-suited feds leads you through the place to a table in the back, where a woman is sitting under the watchful eye of a couple more fed-boys. They're doing their best to look like part of the decor and failing miserably. The woman is a real knockout, of East Indian descent with dark skin, pouty lips and long dark hair in a loose braid that cascades casually over one shoulder. She introduces herself as Ms. Mara Suhar, then tells you she has a very important job and needs some good runners. You can't help but crack a smile ... this could turn out to be a real interesting run.

She finishes her spiel by asking, "Do you know who Anne Penchyk is?"

HOOKS

This scene introduces the runners to Mara Suhar and sets up the particulars of the run. Ms. Suhar acts ultra-chill and confident right off the bat. The runners should respect this lady and want to like her even while they are negotiating with her. She has the "I know what I want, I want you, and this is what you're going to do for me" attitude down cold. In a day and age where everyone has something to hide or to fear, the runners should find it refreshing to meet someone so together and on top of her game.

BEHIND THE SCENES

Once introductions have been made, Mara will get right down to business. She fills the runners in on her background (see **Cast of Shadows**, p. 72) and tells them that she has recently escaped from inside the Chicago Containment Zone with valuable video footage depicting the horrors of Bug City. She also carried out a message from Vincent Penchyk, Anne's Penchyk's brother, who was trapped in the Containment Zone when it went up months ago. Penchyk has not heard from her brother since then, and had feared that he was dead. Having learned otherwise, she is determined to rescue him.

Mara explains that she has contacted the vice-presidential candidate but has not yet had a chance to meet with her in person. This morning, she says, Penchyk sent her these fine Secret Service agents to protect her, some money and a set of videotaped instructions. According to Mara, Anne Penchyk wants her brother's rescue to be handled by professionals who report only to Mara and who are capable of keeping quiet. She does not want it to be seen as an abuse of power or privilege on her part by UCAS voters, many of whom have friends and family that they want rescued from the Containment Zone. Therefore, the shadowrunners Mara hires must carry out the job as discreetly as possible. Penchyk does not want to damage her running mate's political campaign, but her brother is her only living family and she is willing to go to great lengths in order to save him.

According to the taped instructions, Mara is to accompany the runners back into the Containment Zone and help guide them inside Bug City. The runners must get past the UCAS blockade, deal with any threats they run across in the city, locate Vincent Penchyk and get out again with a minimum of fuss and no publicity. If the runners take the job, Penchyk will pay them a total of

100,000 nuyen for successful completion of the run. The runners can attempt to negotiate for more, but keep in mind that Mara can only give them the money Penchyk sent her. She can try to contact Penchyk that evening over the phone (the Secret Service agents will know where she is), and the runners can try to negotiate with Penchyk in person. However, they may find it a tough proposition to get anything more out of her; Penchyk has Negotiation Skill 6, and is nobody's pushover.

In addition to all this, Mara has one condition for her help: she goes in with them to film the whole thing. She wants to sell her scoop to a news network, and offers to split whatever money she gets for the tape evenly with the runners. She believes that helping a possible vice president, plus the prestige of the story, will pole-vault her career into the stratosphere.

Of course, this whole story is a flat-out lie—but the gamemaster should not let on that anything is wrong or strange about it at this point.

The runners can use their own abilities and gear when deciding how to get into the Containment Zone. If the group includes a rigger character who has a suitable vehicle, they can use their own transportation. If the runners are in need of either a rigger or suitable transport, Mara will provide it (via Penchyk) in the form of a hired rigger piloting a Hughes Stallion helicopter. For the rigger's statistics, use the Rigger archetype from p. 59, **SRII.**

DEBUGGING

If the runners flatly refuse Mara's offer, she will show them the videotape Penchyk sent her. In it, Anne makes a moving personal plea, asking if her prospective employees have any family and if they can imagine the pain of having a loved one trapped in the hell that Chicago has become. Penchyk is a master marketer and will not hesitate to tug on the runners' heartstrings to help her cause. If the runners still refuse, Mara will thank them for coming, comment that the glowing reports she heard about them on the streets were obviously wrong (an appeal to vanity always works), and ask the Secret Service agents to escort them to the door. Time to go on to the next adventure.

If a magician character attempts to assense Mara Suhar, keep in mind that she can conceal her true nature with the aura masking power. Treat Suhar as a Grade 6 initiate for purposes of aura masking. If the runner team includes a high-grade initiate potentially capable of penetrating the masking, fudge the dice rolls a bit so that Suhar's cover is not blown right away. You may allow a successful Astral Perception Test to reveal something just a little bit odd about Suhar that the character cannot place, but don't give away too much at this juncture.

If the runners get belligerent or have a sudden attack of violence-prone stupidity, remind them that they are dealing with a big-time VIP who could sic the forces of the UCAS federal government on them if they do not behave themselves. If they give the Secret Service agents any hassle, feel free to let the feds react appropriately; use the Bodyguard archetype, p. 49 in **SRII,** with a Threat/Professional Rating of 4/4

RUNNING THE WALL

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

You're almost ready to go—all you need to do is scan the final checklist one more time to make sure nothing's been overlooked. If you forget something vital, neither the UCAS Army nor the bugs are likely to give you a second chance.

Mara brought you to her hideout, a small, nondescript apartment in what's left of the Westside of Chicago, outside the Containment Zone. It's no mansion, but it'll do as a place to check your gear and prepare yourself for the fun you'll find inside the zone. Ms. Suhar is all set to join you. She's been nothing but cool and professional since the get-go; you're starting to think that if the bright media spotlight ever ceases to agree with her, she could have a promising career as a runner or a fixer.

As you heft your gear and walk into the hallway, Mara says there's someone else coming along for the party. Before you can say "No way in hell," you see the new arrival waiting in the hallway. She's an ork, wearing a sleek black-and-urban-camo outfit with a light armored jacket that shows just how muscular ork women can be. Her hair is bound back, and she's even wearing what looks like a shiny new Ares-make gun holstered at her side. As she moves closer to you, you recognize her and your jaw drops. She holds out a credstick in one gloved hand, looking at all of you with eyes as hard and gray as steel.

"I've decided to go with you," Anne Penchyk says, her voice carefully controlled. "Any objections? Good. Then let's move it. The passcodes are only good for 24 hours."

HOOKS

Turn up the stakes in this scene. Make the runners respect Penchyk's brass, even if her unexpected presence does make their lives more difficult. Stage the blockade run as a scene of high tension and near-disaster that the runners barely manage to get through on sheer skill and guts.

BEHIND THE SCENES

Penchyk will not budge from her plan to go with the runners and they can do nothing to convince her otherwise. To smooth things over, she will offer the team additional nuyen as well as her personal gratitude, which will prove a lot more valuable than mere cred to the runners if she gets elected vice president of the UCAS. If the runners continue to push the issue with her, she will explain to them that she is the only one who can give the guards on the Wall the correct passcode so that they can leave the CZ legitimately by one of the gates. Without her help, the runners will have to try to get out the way they came in. Can they possibly be lucky enough to get in and out alive on their own? Do they really want to take that gamble?

The UCAS military blockade of Chicago is described in the **Bug City** sourcebook. When playing out the actual break-in, use the general outlines given below. As always, adapt the scenario as needed to make entering the CZ difficult, but not impossible. The runners should be spotted, but no guards or spirits will follow them. After all, who breaks *into* Bug City?

GETTING IN BY AIR

The runners will find an aerial approach to the Containment Zone very difficult. UCAS monitoring systems keep careful watch on air traffic, and astral patrols are everywhere in the sky over the Wall. A pilot attempting to crash the CZ this way must make a Piloting Test against a Target Number of 8, recording the total number of successes rolled. The gamemaster should then make a Sensors Test using 6 dice against the Signature of the pilot's vehicle. If the gamemaster rolls more successes on the Sensor Test than the player character did on the Piloting Test, the vehicle has been spotted. Two Force 4 elementals, one air spirit and one fire spirit, will intercept the vehicle. Both elementals are under the control of an astrally projecting military combat mage (use the Combat Mage archetype, p. 50, **SRII**, with a Threat/Professional Rating of 4/3).

Even if the runners make it past the sensor sweeps, they must still evade astral patrols. Use the normal Astral Patrolling rules on p. 92, **Grimoire II**. Standard astral security is a Force 4 watcher patrolling less than 2,000 square meters of Tight Terrain. No additional modifier is given for spotting the vehicle, because watchers look for astral targets first and physical penetrations second. To reflect the difficulty these spirits have with such purely physical/technological objects as vehicles, treat the vehicle like a character. If an astral patrol detects the runners, two elementals will intercept them as described above.

GETTING IN BY LAND

The wall surrounding the Containment Zone is made up mostly of loose debris and chunks of demolished buildings that make it difficult and treacherous to climb. Climbing over any section of the Wall requires 2D6 Complex Actions; a climbing character must make a Climbing (10) Test using 2 dice each turn to continue moving forward. If a test fails, the character slips and must take an additional 1D6 + 2 (round up) Complex Actions to complete the climb. When a character slips, he or she must also make a Damage Resistance Test using Body only against a Target Number of 4 and a base damage of Serious. Impact armor reduces the target number. A +2 modifier applies to all physical actions, including combat, while the character is climbing.

The player characters may be spotted from any of the UCAS army guard towers while climbing over the Wall. For each of the climbers, the gamemaster should make a secret Perception Test using 5 dice, using the target number listed for the appropriate

range on the Weapon Range Table (p. 88, **SRII**) as the base target number. Modify the target number according to applicable visibility and other Perception modifiers (p. 185, **SRII**).

If a given Perception Test is successful, that climber has been spotted. The guards will order that character to halt, or they will open fire. Treat the UCAS soldiers as Corporate Security Guards (p. 205, **SRII**) with a Threat/Professional Rating of 2/2. They wear the equivalent of armored jackets (5/3) and pack a Beretta 101T as a sidearm. Each guard tower is armed with a Colt M22-A2 assault rifle with Recoil Reduction 3, a laser sight, and an underbarrel grenade launcher with six mini-concussion grenades.

GETTING IN BY WATER

Approaching the CZ via the lake is virtually impossible under normal circumstances. The chain of sensor buoys deployed along the coast will detect any boats; the UCAS Navy will intercept any unauthorized vessel and order it to stand down and stay away from the border. However, in the winter large areas of the lake are frozen over and can be traversed by characters willing to take the risk of such a crossing.

If the player characters decide to cross the frozen surface of the lake, the gamemaster should make three secret Perception Tests for each of them as described above, using 3 dice instead of 5. Make one test shortly after the characters begin the crossing, one when they are about halfway across, and one as they near their destination. A successful test means that a military sensor or spotter has noticed that character, and so the runners will be intercepted. If the runners are on the outskirts of the lake, soldiers like those described above will intercept them. If they are on the lake's interior, they will face an astral combat mage commanding a Force 6 water elemental.

The characters may also fall through the ice into the freezing waters of the lake. On each of the three legs of the trip, each character should make a Quickness Test against a Base Target Number of 4. If a character's Body Attribute is greater than his or her Quickness, increase the target number by the difference to reflect that character's greater weight. For example, a troll with Body 10 and Quickness 4 should make his or her Quickness Test against a Target Number of 10 (Base Target Number 4 plus 6—the difference between the troll's Body and Quickness). Extra Body granted by dermal armor and dermal plating counts toward the final target number.

If the test fails, the character falls through the ice. He or she takes 4M Stun damage each turn, reduced only by Body; armor has no effect on this damage. Any character who attempts to pull a fallen character out of the freezing water must make an additional Quickness Test as described above, but with a Base Target Number of 6.

DEBUGGING

Do whatever it takes to get the runners to take Penchyk with them. She has made up her mind and is not above manipulation, threats or outright bribery to get the runners to do what she wants. Make it much simpler for them to agree to do things her way instead of arguing with her. Feel free to use all of the characters' emotional and background quirks to your advantage. Has one of them lost a relative? Appeal to that character's feeling of sympathy. Does one of them admire tough do-it-yourselfers? Remind them that Anne Penchyk is doing just the kind of thing they respect. Use whatever tactic works.

As a last resort, have Suhar use her compulsion power to make the runners more willing to take Penchyk along. Use this kind of strong-arm tactic only if absolutely necessary, as it takes the decision out of the players' hands. If Suhar is forced to tip her hand in this way, you can give the runners a small hint about Suhar's true nature; tell them later on that they're not entirely sure why they decided to let Penchyk come along against their better judgment.

BUG OUT

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

Your trek across the Containment Zone has felt like a tour through all nine circles of Dante's vision of Hell, with the damned grouped together according to their sins and tormented by evil spirits. Every single inhabitant of the CZ has withdrawn into one of dozens of different enclaves and collectives to protect themselves from the bugs, and nobody trusts strangers around here. Not surprising, when any stranger can look metahuman on the outside but be one of the bugs (or their stooges) on the inside. Trust the wrong person and you may die—or worse, end up an insect.

You've carefully sidestepped most of the enclaves in order to avoid detection, but now you're going to have to deal with one of the worst of them. From what Mara told you and what else you've been able to learn, the Volk are some of the most racist isolationists living in Bug City, and they don't like strangers knocking on their door one bit. They'll like you even less, with an ork bigwig in tow. You're not sure why Anne Penchyk's brother would take refuge with people like these, but you've seen plenty of proof so far that the situation in the CZ is making for some pretty strange bedfellows.

HOOKS

The real reason for the runners' presence in the Containment Zone is revealed in this encounter. The tension in the scene should build up to an explosive confrontation, in which Mara reveals her true colors and the runners must fight for their lives to get out of a racist, hostile enclave bowling for their blood.

BEHIND THE SCENES

Mara Suhar is leading the runners into a trap. She tells them that Vincent Penchyk sought refuge with the Volk, a violently anti-metahuman, anti-magical group of survivalists who control a section of the Containment Zone along Interstate 55. The Volk surround their territory with razor-wire fences and claim to protect the "true" victims of the Chicago disaster: mundane humans. They murder metahumans and magicians as quickly and brutally as they do any insect spirits that cross their path. As the Chicago winter has dragged on and on, refusing to give way to spring and making conditions in the CZ even more harsh, the Volk have become especially militant. For more information on the Volk, see pp. 113–14, **Bug City.**

The area of Volksville where Mara says that the runners have the best chance of finding Vincent is near the junction of Interstate 55, on the Northside near 31st Street. That area is fairly well protected, but it also features a smaller concentration of people because people tend to cluster toward the Wall. The Volk are well

armed and have a lot of guards, but Mara will point out that their hatred of magicians means that they have few or no magical defenses. The runners should be able to take advantage of this weakness.

GETTING IN

Volksville is surrounded by a makeshift chain-link fence topped with concertina wire and patrolled by small groups of armed guards to keep the enclave's borders free from insect spirits, looters and other dangerous elements. The fence is three meters high and has a Barrier Rating of 8. The concertina wire atop the fence will do 4M damage to any character who grabs it or falls against it. Climbing over the fence without taking damage from the wire requires a successful Athletics (6) Test. The gamemaster can modify the rest based on the means the runners devise for getting over the fence. Gates break up the fence along the roads, built large enough to drive vehicles through. Each gate is manned by four guards (see **Volk Soldiers**).

A pair of Volk soldiers patrols each 50 meters of the fence. Each pair of soldiers is in sight of at least one other pair at any given time in their patrol. These guards do not issue warnings to intruders unless they look like helpless humans (non-combatants, especially women and children). If the intruders are metahumans or magicians (obviously using magic or simply "too mage-looking"), the guards will open fire in an attempt to drive off or kill the intruders. Gunfire of any kind will bring many more guards at a run to the location of the shooting. Two more pairs of soldiers will arrive in about 5 Combat Turns, and two more will show up 5 Combat Turns after that.

Volk Soldiers

B	S	Q	I	W	C	R	E	Armor
4	3	3	2	3	2	2	6	4

Initiative: 2 + 1D6
Threat/Professional Rating: 3/3
Skills: Firearms 4, Interrogation 2, Unarmed Combat 3
Gear: AK-97 Carbine [Assault Rifle, 30 (clip), SA/BF/FA, 6M], Lined Coat (4/2), Radio Communicator

The runners have no chance of fooling or getting past the Volk border guards if they are in the company of any nonhumans (which includes magicians, in the Volk's opinion). If they have concealed the nonhuman members of their team (including Penchyk) through magical or mundane means, they might get inside Volksville with a sufficiently convincing story about being refugees looking for sanctuary, backed up by successful Charisma or Etiquette Tests or some type of magical reinforcement. Keep in mind that the Volk do not use magic, and so even the simplest illusion or manipulation spell would work.

In the end, of course, it doesn't matter whether the runners sneak in or bluff their way past the soldiers to get into Volksville. Once they are inside, all hell breaks loose.

TRUE COLORS

Mara will wait until the runners have gotten a fair way inside Volk territory before showing her true colors. At a suitably vulnerable moment—for example, when the runners are sounding someone out about Vincent Penchyk's whereabouts—she will move near Penchyk and use her fear power against the runners, driving them away from the two women. She will say, "You've done well. I'll leave you to your fellow humans," and then assume her true mantis form and seize Penchyk. The sudden appearance of a bug inside the fence will panic the Volk; every armed member of the enclave will come running, believing that the shadowrunners must be disguised bugs or their agents. Carrying Penchyk, Mara will make huge leaps back toward the fence and then over it into the city. The Volk will take a couple of shots at her, but will not pursue the mantid beyond the borders of their territory.

The runners have no prayer of convincing the Volk that they are not bugs or allied with the bugs. Plus, the Volk will attack metahuman runners and magicians on principle. Dozens of combatants are prowling around in the area, and they quickly turn into a mob howling for the player characters' blood. Use the statistics given for the soldiers above for most of the Volk combatants; however, most of the enclave members will not be as well armed. Many are packing pistols, and some carry only melee weapons. The gamemaster chooses the specific weapons carried by the Volk.

Stage the fight as a frantic chase between the runners and the frenzied mob. The Volk will try to prevent the runners from escaping, and will close all the gates into their enclave. The runners will have to find some means to hold off the mob or escape. If the runners want to fight, make it clear that they will not be able to handle the hundreds of people coming after them unless they have some serious firepower at their command. Magically active characters inclined to rely on their gifts to save the team should review some of the inherent dangers of using magic in Bug City before pulling out all the stops.

DEBUGGING

Mara should get away with Penchyk fairly easily. If necessary, use all of her powers (Confusion and Fear will be particularly useful) to keep the runners helpless long enough for her to make good her escape. If the runners want to go after her, remind them that they have to deal with an army of hostile Volk first. If the runners insist on using big guns and even big magic to stop the mantis, remind them that without Anne Penchyk they have no easy way out—and do they really want to risk killing a UCAS vice-presidential candidate?

If the runners get caught in a serious fight with the guards while trying to get into Volksville, Mara will reveal herself at that point and grab Penchyk, leaving the runners to deal with the soldiers. In this case, the guards will fire on the runners rather than on the departing mantis. As long as the bug is leaving their territory, they no longer care about killing it.

A STRANGE TURN OF EVENTS

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

You're in the middle of a mob that's howling for your blood. Inside a city gone mad. Your client has just been nabbed by a preying mantis the size of a horse. All in all, this is not turning out to be one of your better days.

The Volk mob is backing you into a corner; pretty soon there won't be anywhere left for you to run. As you look around wildly for an escape route, you spot a pale figure gesturing to you from a nearby alleyway. You figure you've got nothing to lose, and sprint toward it.

You hit the alley and stop short at the sight of several figures clad in mismatched synthdenim and urban camo. They're all carrying compact SMGs slung over their shoulders. Their skin is gray and their bodies thin but muscular. They have small, sharp teeth, and they look at you out of eyes nearly as white as a blind person's. Ghouls. Great. Just when you thought things couldn't get any worse.

With a feral grin, one of the ghouls points toward an open manhole cover. Beneath it lie the dark, stinking tunnels of the sewers. You hear the noise of the mob; they're closing in. Choice time, chummer—certain death right here, or a chance of becoming a ghoul's dinner down in the sewers?

When the runners reach Ghoultown, read the following aloud:

After a mercifully brief trip through the sewers, you surface not far from Volksville. One of the ghouls sneers at how grateful you are to be out of the dank tunnels, and makes a bitter comment about not being too fond of it himself. As you make your way through the darkened streets toward the ugly blocks of the Cabrini-Green development, the ghoul tells you about his people's new home.

Cabrini-Green, he says, has been a bad-hoop neighborhood for more than sixty years, and has only gotten worse in the past several. A few years ago the city of Chicago decided to solve its ghoul problem by moving all the ghouls out of the Shattergraves and into the old Cabrini public-housing blocks that were too rundown and hellish for human habitation. Then they threw up a wall around the place for the residents' "protection" and prepared to forget about the whole thing—or maybe just drop a bomb on the place and be done with it.

Bug City changed all that. Overnight, the ghouls became the least of the city's worries compared to the swarm of hostile bug spirits overrunning the place. Turns out the city's decision to warehouse the ghouls in their own ghetto actually did them a favor; the wall around the ghouls' "relocation zone" did just as good a job keeping the bugs and everyone else out as it did keeping the ghouls in. The inhabitants dubbed their enclave Ghoultown, and used their contacts in the shadows to get enough weapons and ... supplies ... to survive and defend their territory. Nowadays, Ghoultown is probably one of the safer places in the Containment Zone. The ghoul laughs. Ironic, isn't it?

The ghouls have strengthened the high pre-fab wall around Ghoultown. They've added guard towers and stronger structural supports, and small bands of armed ghouls patrol the boundary. They can see in the dark as well as a human does in the daylight, as well as keep watch on the astral plane. The gates open to let your group pass through; you can feel dozens of pairs of eyes watching you as you enter. You're starting to understand how an animal feels on the way to the slaughterhouse. You'd swear you saw a couple of ghouls lick their lips as you went past.

Your escorts lead you into one of the buildings, through corridors that are surprisingly clean (considering the nature of the inhabitants). You follow them into a claustrophobic apartment that's been converted into an office of sorts, with a desk and a couple of tables on which several modern computers and data pads are set up. There's also a bookshelf full of actual hard-copy books, plus a couple of cases of chips. Seated behind the desk is a ghoul, so thin even for one of his kind that his features look as if they'd been sculpted from steel. He waves a skeletal hand, taking in the whole of the room around him as he speaks.

"Welcome to Ghoultown. My name is Tamir Grey, and I have a proposition for you."

HOOKS

One of the truths of Bug City is that a common enemy makes for some strange bedfellows. This encounter is powerful proof of that maxim. The runners should feel distrustful of and even disgusted by the ghouls at first, but come to feel some sympathy for them once they get to know them. Runners who have heartlessly hunted and killed ghouls in the past should have a chance to find out that the flesh-eaters are still people in many of the ways that really count.

BEHIND THE SCENES

A group of ghouls sent to spy on the Volk arrived in time to see the mob start to close on the shadowrunners. The lead ghoul decided to save the runners in the hope that the ghouls might get some potentially useful information from them. In the ghouls' book, anyone the Volk doesn't like can't be all bad.

The ghouls escort the runners through a series of narrow sewer tunnels that run underneath parts of the city. While in the tunnels, the gamemaster may wish to improvise an encounter with some bugs that have gotten into the sewer. Mosquito spirits make an excellent choice, as they tend to breed in dark, dank tunnels. (For information on mosquito spirits, see pp. 81 and 141–42, **Bug City.**) The ghouls prefer to avoid the sewers when they can, and they will take the runners back to the surface as soon as they are clear of Volk territory.

Ghouls (3)

B	S	Q	I	W	C	R	E	Armor
7	6	5	4	5	1	8	(6)	4

Initiative: 4 + 1D6
Threat/Professional Rating: 3/2
Skills: Firearms 3, Tracking 3, Unarmed Combat 4
Powers: Enhanced Sense (Hearing, Smell)
Weaknesses: Allergy (Sunlight, Mild), Reduced Sense (Blind)
Gear: Lined Coat, Uzi III (Machine Gun, 24 (clip), BF, 6M)

Once they arrive in Ghoultown, the runners are taken to see Tamir Grey, one of the leaders of the Chicago ghoul community (for more about Grey, see p. 150, **Bug City**). Grey will question the runners about what they are doing in the Containment Zone; he wants to discover if the runners are smugglers and, if so, what contraband they might be carrying into the city. He will pay careful attention to the runners' story, and will ask probing questions to determine if they are lying to him. He will also inquire about any obstacles that the runners encountered along the way, gathering information about the Wall, UCAS forces, the bugs, the Volk and anything else the runners might know.

If the runners are honest with Grey and tell him their story, the ghoul leader will be most curious about Anne Penchyk and the mantis spirit that took her. He will tell the runners that encounters with mantids are rare in the Containment Zone, especially recently—in the past few weeks, the mantids have mostly dropped out of sight. He is quite curious about why the hunter insects have been so quiet lately.

After the runners have spoken to Tamir Grey for a while, another ghoul storms into Grey's small office. Tall and muscular for a ghoul, he is dressed in combat leathers and wearing a sidearm (like almost all of the inhabitants of Ghoultown). He shouts at Grey, furious that Grey has brought strangers into Ghoultown and is questioning them without notifying the other leaders of the community. Grey shows very little reaction to this outburst; he will calmly introduce the runners to Blaine Hammond, commander of Ghoultown's defensive forces and another leading voice in the ghoul community. Hammond will sneer and bare his sharp teeth in the runners' direction. He makes it clear that he does not want "normals" in Ghoultown at all, except perhaps as livestock, and that he will take up the matter of Grey's "insolence" with the other leaders of the community.

After Hammond says his piece and storms out, Grey tells the runners they will talk again later and has them escorted to a room where they can rest. The ghouls will leave the runners alone for the most part; this rest period is their opportunity to recuperate from recent events and plan their next move. Once the runners have had a chance to stew for a while, Grey will come to see them. He will tell them that anti-norm sentiment is running high in Ghoultown, and that Hammond represents a militant ghoul separatist faction who would like nothing better than to have the runners for lunch ... literally. Grey feels that the ghouls must work with other races to survive, and that the paramount concern of everyone in the Containment Zone should be fighting the bugs.

If the runners have told Grey their whole story, including what they know about Mara Suhar, he will tell them that he has some information regarding mantis spirits in the CZ. However, he does not offer this information until the player characters agree to a proposal. Grey wants the runners to carry several optical disks out of the Containment Zone. The disks contain an interview with him, as well as several excerpts from his journal writings about ghoul society, the situation in the city and the way the ghouls have dealt with the bugs. He is adamant that these documents get out of Chicago and into the public eye.

His information on the mantis spirits is slim but accurate. The ghouls have been trading for live humans with a gang called the Desolation Angels, and Ghoultown patrols say that a woman matching Mara Suhar's description was with the mantids. (If the characters do not describe Suhar to Grey, have Grey describe the woman representing the Angels in the mantids' dealings with the ghoul community. The runners should put two and two together and realize that Suhar has been representing the Angels in these transactions.) The Angels claim an area near the Core. If the runners have given Grey less than complete information or lied to him, he will tell them what he can, and it will be up to the runners to do what they will with the information. Ghouls loyal to Grey will escort the runners to the outskirts of Ghoultown, and Tamir Grey will ask the runners to remember his assistance in their future dealings with his kind.

DEBUGGING

If the runners decide to fight the Volk mob rather than take the escape route offered by the ghouls, or if they double-cross and attack the ghouls at the first opportunity, they are on their own. They must figure out where Mara has taken Anne Penchyk on their own, and they certainly won't be making a lot of friends in Bug City. Once word of the runners' activities gets out, other groups in the CZ will also be less cooperative toward them.

Tamir Grey is intended as a means to keep the runners on the right track. If the runners lie outright to him, the gamemaster should judge the ghoul leader's reaction based on how successfully they tell their story. Grey excels at reading people; also keep in mind that he is a dual being, and can therefore assense the runners' auras. He will do so throughout their interview to detect any attempts at falsehood, and so the runners should be encouraged to tell him the truth. If they hand Grey a line and he buys it (in the gamemaster's opinion), Grey will proceed based on what he knows. The only way the runners have much chance of getting useful help from Grey is by telling him the truth. Grey is adamant about the need for "norms" to understand his people, and helps the characters primarily to make sure his information about the ghouls reaches the outside world. If the player characters do not want to smuggle Grey's disks, remind them how much nuyen the data will net them on the open media market.

If the characters are stupid enough to start trouble in Ghoultown, especially with Grey or Blaine Hammond, they will quickly be overwhelmed by a pack of ghouls and locked up in a basement room—one of the ghouls' "larders," filled with preserved human meat. The runners are being kept "on the hoof," so to speak, and they will have to escape on their own before they become dinner.

TO THE RESCUE

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

The Desolation Angels' turf is on the outskirts of the Shattergraves, the haunted ruins surrounding the fallen Sears Tower in the heart of Chicago. Even the outer edges of the ruined buildings and streets give you an uneasy chill; you imagine that you can see shadowy shapes moving in the dim light of the ruins. You tell yourself it's a trick of the light and hope it's true.

You've checked out the area carefully, and it looks like there's somebody home in an abandoned nightclub a few blocks away from the Shattergraves, near Fullerton and Halsted. The unlit sign outside the place reads, "The Kaleidoscope," but no bright lights or colors shine out from the place. It's closed down, like a lot of nonessential businesses inside the Containment Zone.

The club shows a few signs of life, however. You can see a faint light in the entranceway, and every once in a while you hear a scream. The mirrored glass in the windows and the heavy construction of the walls makes it difficult to see anything more from outside. The inhabitants might just be squatters or refugees looking for a decent place to hide out and sleep, and you've heard about hermits and other weirdoes hanging out near the Shattergraves, but your gut tells you that you're on the right track. This is the bug nest—you can feel it in your bones. Now you've got to figure out how to get inside and back out without getting your head ripped off.

You're starting to miss dealing with corporate security goons. Oh, for the simple days.

HOOKS

This is it—the climatic fight scene and "rescue." Go to town with it; make it fast, furious and fun. Let the runners cut loose; in Bug City, nobody's going to come and investigate a small-scale urban war (frag, they happen all the time). If the runners brought some heavy ordinance with them into the CZ, now's the time to break it out and start kicking hoop.

BEHIND THE SCENES

The mantis spirits use the Kaleidoscope club as a home base for some of their activities. The spirit cabal keeps what equipment they use here, as well as housing their victims in the club while preparing them to be invested with more mantis spirits. There are seven mantis spirits in the club when the runners arrive—two males and three females, plus Mara and Vixen. All of the females except Vixen are in human form, but will assume their true forms if a fight breaks out. They have the same statistics in both manifest forms, because they are manifest spirits rather than flesh-forms. Also in the room are two fresh corpses. The runners seem to have interrupted the mantids' dinner hour.

The entrances to the club are locked and secured with Rating 3 maglocks. Apart from an alarm that will go off if the maglocks are tampered with unsuccessfully, the Kaleidoscope has no other security systems. The walls of the building have a Barrier Rating of 15, and the windows and doors are made of armored glass with a Barrier Rating of 8. Any loud noise will bring one of the spirits in astral form to investigate. Keep in mind that the mantids are dual beings and can see astral forms; therefore, if a runner attempts to scout out the building using astral projection, one of the spirits will pursue and attack the intruder in astral form.

Penchyk is in a back room of the club, accessible only via the main bar. She is not a prisoner and is therefore not tied up. Immediately upon hearing any sounds of combat in the main bar, she will handcuff herself, rip her clothes, and in general make herself look abused. When the runners enter the club, Vixen will be hovering over the main room in her true form. As soon as the runners are detected, the mantids will attack, while Vixen goes to the back room and gets Penchyk.

Penchyk will put on a classic hostage act for the runners' benefit, screaming and pleading for mercy. If the runners hope to pull Penchyk out of harms' way, they will have to act quickly. The spirits will fight savagely, showing the runners no mercy. All of the spirits present are Force 5 except for Vixen, who is Force 7. If the runners get to Penchyk, she will beg them to free her as soon as possible and will insist on helping some prisoners in the back of the club. This apparent act of mercy is another setup; the prisoners, two young women, are actually the first set of mantis spirits scheduled to leave the Containment Zone. They have the same statistics as the female mantids described below, but have no gear or equipment and look as if they have been mistreated.

Vixen

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	R	Armor
11	10	10	7	7	7	(7)	7	7

Initiative: 17 (27) + 1D6
Threat/Professional Rating: 7/3
Attacks: Skill 7, Damage 10S
Powers: Animal Control (Mantids), Aura Masking, Compulsion, Enhanced Senses (Smell), Fear, Human Form, Summoning
Weaknesses: Vulnerability (Insecticides)
Notes: Attributes listed are for manifest form. In astral form, all Attributes are equal to Force.

Female Mantids (3)

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	R	Armor
9	9	8	5	5	5	5	5	5

Initiative: 15 (25) + 1D6
Threat/Professional Rating: 5/3
Attacks: Skill 5, Damage 8S

Powers: Animal Control (Mantids), Aura Masking, Compulsion, Enhanced Senses (Smell), Fear, Human Form, Summoning
Weaknesses: Vulnerability (Insecticides)
Notes: Attributes listed are for manifest form. In astral form, all Attributes are equal to Force

Male Mantids (2)

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	R	Armor
7	10	8	—	4	2	(5)	5	6

Initiative: 15 (25) + 1D6
Threat/Professional Rating: 5/3
Attacks: Skill 5, Damage 10M
Powers: Enhanced Senses (Smell)
Weaknesses: Reduced Senses (Sight), Vulnerability (Insecticides)
Notes: Attributes listed are for manifest form. In astral form, all Attributes are equal to Force

DEBUGGING

The only way the runners can really mess up in this encounter is by getting themselves or Anne Penchyk killed. Make the fight challenging, but not outright lethal. Play around with the Threat Ratings of the mantids as necessary to make the fight a good one. If the combat is going badly for the runners, give them some help in the form of another group of people choosing that night to attack the mantis spirits. A group of wasp or ant spirits can show up and turn the melee into a three-way mass of confusion with all sides fighting it out, or Tamir Grey might decide to send some ghouls to help the runners in exchange for a future favor.

If the runners are kicking the direk out of the mantids, feel free to have a few other members of the cabal show up unexpectedly (after all, the runners have no idea of the size of Vixen's circle). Alternatively, have Vixen or Mara break off the fight and leave Penchyk to the runners. Keep in mind that the spirits will make use of all their abilities against the runners and will fight intelligently. Also remember that the spirits have access to the memories of their hosts, so they will be much more familiar with the technology and capabilities of the runners than other bugs.

The runners should survive, but barely. Make this one of the fights that they have nightmares about. They should want out of Bug City so fast that they will agree immediately with whatever Anne Penchyk wants to do. If the runners want to go hunt all the bugs down, have Anne remind them that the gate passcodes will only remain valid for a little while longer. If the runners do not want to get stuck in the CZ, they have to leave soon.

IF ANNE PENCHYK DIES

If the real Anne Penchyk dies in this encounter, another one appears on the public trid two days later, apologizing profusely to the press and UCAS voters for having canceled a few campaign events due to illness (see **Picking Up the Pieces**, p. 71).

PICKING UP THE PIECES

Once the runners have freed Penchyk and defeated the mantis, the apparently grateful candidate informs them that the spirits killed her brother; Mara Suhar's taped interview with him was simply bait to bring Anne to Bug City. She says she has no idea why the mantis spirits were interested in her, only that they intended to use her as a host. She will thank the runners and apologize for leading them on a fool's errand. Though she is deeply sorrowful when speaking of her brother's death, she will keep her composure.

If the gamemaster wants to, he or she can improvise additional encounters with insect spirits and other inhabitants of the CZ as the runners are on the way out. Anne Penchyk leads the group to the nearest guard tower and gate and insists on talking to the guard in private. After a few minutes the guard will come out of the tower and allow the runners and the young women to leave the Containment Zone. While they wait for the rescue helicopter, the UCAS military can provide first aid (they have several biomed kits lying around) as well as food and water, but they insist that the characters remove their clothes and dress in antiseptic jumpsuits, jackets and shoes. Told only that "they must be decontaminated," the player characters cannot learn why the guards enforce this procedure—their best guess is that it serves an attempt by the UCAS government to maintain the fiction of a vitas outbreak. Their weapons also will be confiscated. After about an hour, a military helicopter lands and takes the runners to O'Hare airport. There, Anne Penchyk gives them their money, plus a bonus of about half the value of what the government confiscated. She also gives them plane tickets back to their home city.

Penchyk will act grateful to the shadowrunners for saving her life, and will definitely owe them a future favor (which could come in handy should she be elected VP). The characters can consider her good for some help in the future, but keep in mind that Penchyk will not do anything for the shadowrunners that would compromise her own position or in any way hinder the plans of the mantis cabal.

Two days after the run, Anne gives an impassioned speech about her quest for her brother and finding the two young women. Conveniently, she leaves the runners out of it. Yeats's campaign gets a big boost in the polls, though most of the other candidates dismiss the entire event as a big publicity stunt.

The runners should be able to sell Tamir Grey's information to a media outlet for up to 10,000 nuyen; a standard Negotiation Test can raise or lower this amount. Grey monitors the various Shadowland boards as best he can from inside the Containment Zone, and word will eventually get back to him that the runners upheld their end of the bargain with him (or failed to do so). If the runners come through for Grey, they have made a lifelong friend of him.

If Anne Penchyk does not survive the adventure, the gamemaster has several options. First of all, with Anne dead they cannot just walk out the Containment Zone gate. They must escape on their own, and they have made that job a lot harder.

Second, play up the fact that the player characters are responsible for the death of a vice-presidential candidate. The UCAS government will certainly start an investigation into Penchyk's disappearance—if they haven't already—and will quickly discover the phone calls between her and Mara Suhar. From there, the feds can easily find out who dined with Mara in a posh restaurant in the conspicuous company of Secret Service agents. Finally, use those Secret Service agents. The runners should be praying that none of them carried a cybereye camera. With all that coming down on their heads, the runners might as well stay in the Containment Zone; they won't survive much longer outside it than inside.

If the runners stay in Bug City, of course, the mantids will hunt them down. Penchyk's death means that one of their most important links to the outside world has been severed, and they don't take that lightly. Assuming Vixen survives the final battle, she will make it her personal cause to take the runners out.

Finally, if the runners stay (or get marooned) in Bug City, they cannot pass Tamir Grey's information on to the media. That means they have one less friend in a very, very unfriendly place.

If Anne Penchyk dies in Bug City, the announcement that Anne Penchyk is back on the campaign trail should shock the runners to their bones. Make them wonder what they got involved in. If Penchyk is campaigning, then who died in the CZ? If Anne Penchyk died in the CZ, then who's running for vice-president? If they try to contact Penchyk (or whoever she may be) to find out what is going on, Mr. Secret Service and his friends come visiting and bust their hoops for harassing the vice-presidential candidate. The feds will lock them up for the duration of the campaign, and maybe even longer if the Yeats/Penchyk ticket gets elected. Also, the mantis spirits will not forget what the runners cost them; word spreads rapidly among the various mantis cabals, any one of which will kill the runners with no compunction. Not many people get to be number one on the hit list of the UCAS government and a bug cabal; that's quite the fifteen minutes of fame (though maybe not the kind the runners would have chosen ...).

AWARDING KARMA

Award team Karma for the adventure as listed below. Award individual Karma according to the standard rules (p. 199, **SRII**).

Survival	1 point
Threat	2 points
Rescuing Penchyk	1 point
Making allies of the ghouls	1 point
Getting Tamir Grey's diaries to the media	1 point

LEGWORK

Because this adventure is a straightforward search-and-rescue run, the runners do not have much legwork to do. Once inside Bug City and cut off from their usual contacts, they will be much more worried about survival than anything else, and so most of the legwork should happen before the runners go over the Wall.

In the initial stages of the adventure, the runners may wish to check out the people they have just agreed to work for as well as conditions in Chicago. The Success Tables below present the information that the runners will be able to acquire on those subjects.

ANNE PENCHYK

Appropriate Contacts (Target Number 4)

Any Corporate, Political or Media contact.

Successes	Results
1	"Penchyk? She's Yeats's running mate. She's an ork, and from what I hear, a pretty savvy businesswoman."
2	"Anne Penchyk is a real do-it-yourself, hands-on type. She built her business on her own, and she likes to stay involved in things."
3	"Penchyk's a straight shooter. Honest and fair, but no pushover. She's vocal about metahuman rights. In fact, she's vocal about anything she believes in."
4+	"Penchyk's real down on the whole mess in Chicago. Word is, she's got family there, and she's completely cut off from them just like everyone else who's got someone in Bug City. She's said more than once that she wants to see something done about it. Knowing her, she probably won't wait for the government to handle it."

MARA SUHAR

Appropriate Contacts (Target Number 5)

Any Corporate or Media contact.

Successes	Results
1	"Some media-type from Chicago. Why?"
2	"Suhar is—or was—the weekend anchorwoman for a local affiliate in Chi-town before Bug City went down. Had a real reputation for hard-hitting interviewing and investigative reporting. Haven't heard anything about her since the Wall went up."
3+	"Suhar and her old news crew have been trying to send pirate transmissions out of Bug City to give everyone a look at what's going on in there. Last I heard, she was tracking down some hot lead."

CAST OF SHADOWS

The following NPCs appear in order of their importance to the story.

ANNE PENCHYK

Anne Penchyk has built her career and her life on not taking "no" for an answer. When she goblinized unexpectedly in her twenties, she refused to accept the disdain of her former friends and colleagues, refused to believe that her once-promising career in marketing and advertising was over, and refused to believe that her metamorphosis had changed her self-worth. Instead, she picked herself up and began all over again, moving back to her native Midwest and starting up her own marketing-consulting firm.

She began as a one-woman shop, working out of her home via the Matrix. The anonymity of the Matrix network allowed her to work with clients who would not have been entirely comfortable dealing face-to-face with an ork woman who had as much (or more) business savvy than they did. As her reputation grew, her connections with other metahumans in the business world helped keep her new venture growing until she attracted the attention of more and more prominent clients. Her consulting firm, AP Designs, has enjoyed the luxury of choosing its clients for the past several years and is known as one of the best marketing/advertising firms in the Midwest sector of the UCAS.

While building her new business, Penchyk also became active in local politics as a spokeswoman for metahuman rights. She donated hundreds of hours of time to political candidates and causes that she saw as benefiting the metahuman community, and became very outspoken on the issue of metahuman rights. Her ad campaigns put several state officials in the Midwest into office, and her business practices reflected her ethical stance on equality for metahumans. In order to continue using her firm, several of her clients eventually changed their company policies to be more metahuman-friendly.

Penchyk's activism eventually led her to run for office. She served several terms as a UCAS Representative for the state of Wisconsin, becoming a strong voice in Congress for comprehensive metahuman rights. The debate over greater integration of metahumans into the UCAS military led Anne to meet often with General Franklin Yeats, a human who sympathized with her cause. The two became good friends, and when Yeats chose to throw his hat in the ring for the presidential race, he tapped Anne Penchyk as his running mate.

Penchyk's friends say her personality has changed since her brother was trapped behind the Wall in Chicago. Though she has thrown herself wholeheartedly into the campaign, she devotes as much time and energy as possible to discovering her brother's fate. She pursues leads herself when time allows, and hires others to follow up clues when her campaign commitments demand her full attention. While her previous efforts for political action were philanthropic, she now seems determined to gain enough personal power to give her actions and opinions significant political weight.

Penchyk is a woman of iron will and determination, the perfect candidate for a mantis spirit. She may or may not have actually become a mantis host; no one knows at this point, nor does anyone suspect that she is working with the Desolation Angels in Bug City. Her battles do not take place on the mean streets of the metro

plexes, but she is courageous and does not back down easily. The runners will find it difficult to coddle or patronize her; she will yield to their superior experience in matters of shadowrunning because that is what she hired them for, but she takes absolutely no guff from them. Her only goal on this run is to get into the Containment Zone. Once she gets in safely, the runners are expendable.

Attributes

Body: 6
Quickness: 3
Strength: 4
Charisma: 4
Intelligence: 4
Willpower: 4
Essence: 5
Reaction: 3

Initiative: 4 + 1D6
Threat/Professional Rating: 2/3

Skills

Administration: 4
Car: 2
Etiquette (Corporate): 6
Etiquette (Media): 4
Etiquette (Political): 6
Leadership (Political): 4
Marketing: 8
Negotiation: 6

Cyberware

Chipjack
Datajack
Display Link
Headware Memory (50 Mp)

MARA SUHAR

Mara Suhar was once an attractive woman of East Indian descent, a fourth-generation UCAS citizen who used her beauty and keen wit to work her way through journalism school in Chicago and up the broadcasting ladder. In record time, she became an anchorwoman for a major network affiliate in the Chicago metroplex. Her professional, no-nonsense attitude toward her work, plus her skill at investigative reporting and hard-hitting interviews, earned her several awards.

Like thousands of others, Suhar was trapped in the Chicago Containment Zone after the Cermak Blast. Never one to shirk a challenge, she decided to make the best of her situation and start gathering information for a fantastic documentary about Bug City. She scrounged the necessary equipment and used her old studio as a home base, leading a rag-tag group of her co-workers around the city after hot leads. Unfortunately, Suhar's investigation got a bit too probing. She drew the interest of Vixen, the dominant female of the mantis spirits that make up the Desolation Angels. Vixen had the reporter captured and invested her with a female mantis spirit.

Suhar now exists only as a convenient disguise for the mantis spirit that possesses her. The spirit uses Suhar's memories and experiences skillfully in conjunction with her own compulsion power to subtly influence the humans around her to do her will. Utterly loyal to Vixen and her sister mantids, Suhar devotes all her efforts toward carrying out their alien purposes.

Attributes

B	S	Q	I	W	C	R	E	Armor
8	8	9 x 4	5	5	5	15	5 (A)	5

Initiative: 25 (35) + 1D6
Force: 5
Threat/Professional Rating: 5/4
Attacks: Skill 15, 8S Damage
Powers: Animal Control (Mantids), Aura Masking, Compulsion, Enhanced Senses (Smell), Fear, Human Form, Summoning
Weaknesses: Vulnerability (Insecticides)
Note: The Attributes listed apply to Suhar in manifest form. In astral form, all Attributes are equal to Force.

KENNETH BRACKHAVEN

PARTY AFFILIATION: ARCHCONSERVATIVE
"ONE PEOPLE, ONE NATION"

>>>>>[This editorial comes from UCAS Voice, a sometimes shrill but always informative e-zine. As with the Yoats bio, put your ideology filter on before you read this; the editor goes a little overboard once or twice.]<<<<<

—Captain Chaos (13:45:21/02-10-57)

WOLF IN SHEEP'S CLOTHING?

"I pledge to you, my friends—I will use the office of the presidency to defend our traditions and the values of faith, family and country from any and all directions. We possess a proud heritage that we must reclaim from the dust and dirt of years of political corruption and moral decay. If we do, we can pave the way to a new era of greatness as one people, one nation, under God."

Sound reasonable? Desirable? Inspiring, even? Then consider the source, and take a damned hard look at the fine print and between the lines. The words you just read come from the declaration speech of UCAS presidential candidate Kenneth Brackhaven, high-powered corporate magnate and racist thug. Oh, he doesn't *look* like the typical bigot at first glance; he wears designer suits, speaks in a cultivated voice and can point to a life of privilege that's utterly alien to the angry, working-class stiffs who make up the foot soldiers of the anti-metahuman brigades. Nonetheless, he and they are brothers under the skin.

The way Ken Brackhaven sees the world, metahumans are the source of most—if not all—of what's wrong with it. He may even hold metahumans responsible for the death of his mother, in a backhanded way; she died of minor complications following Kenneth's birth in 2011, in a hospital too swamped with changeling cases to care adequately for her. You can see the logic, can't you? "If not for all those elves and dwarfs, I'd have had a mommy growing up." But instead, Kenneth was left to the tender mercies of his father, a corporate shark and virulent racist who taught his son everything he knew. (And we do mean everything.)

Brackhaven Senior, an investor and financier once best known in certain political circles for publishing a tract "proving" that humans were innately more intelligent than metahumans, wasn't above pulling strings to help his son get ahead. Though young Kenny Brackhaven was an indifferent student at best, with a "D" average in his sophomore year of high school, Papa Brackhaven persuaded the president of the board at Pacific State University to give Kenny a place. Kenny graduated by the skin of his teeth with a bachelor's degree in marketing and promptly enrolled in Harvard Business School (entrance also engineered by dear old Dad). After earning his MBA (bought and paid for with promises of generous alumni gifts), Kenneth went to work in the family investments business.

Somewhere along the line, Kenneth picked up a few business smarts; since becoming head of Brackhaven Investments upon his father's death in 2044, Kenneth has managed the company with something like competence. His real gift, however, was for politics. Throughout the 2040s, Kenneth Brackhaven became increasingly involved in the Seattle political scene. His fundraising and lobbying organization, Citizen's Coalition For Security (CCFS), became a powerful voice in metroplex politics surrounding such issues as taxation, job security and education. Though Brackhaven sold his group and its ideas to the public as simply "common sense and traditional values," positions that the organization espoused show a distinct anti-metahuman bias. For example, the CCFS was instrumental in the defeat of Governor Schultz's tax package in 2052; had the package passed, it would have redistributed property-tax income and funneled desperately needed

funds to schools in Seattle's poorer, mostly metahuman neighborhoods. But you can't keep 'em down if you educate 'em too well—so Ken Brackhaven and the CCFS torpedoed the last chance for Seattle's metahuman kids to get a decent education.

Meanwhile, the money has kept rolling in for Brackhaven investments and all the companies that spiral out from it like a spider's web. Through ruthless acquisitions and just-this-side-of-illegal maneuvers, Kenneth Brackhaven expanded the family fortune into hundreds of millions of nuyen. He has by far the largest war chest of any presidential candidate in this race, and clearly he intends to find out if the highest office in the land can be bought like so much real estate. The Brackhaven campaign would deny any such allegation, of course. They say their candidate is a down-to-earth businessman, an upstanding member of the community, and an exemplar of family values too long missing from UCAS public life. What they won't tell you is that Brackhaven's vaunted "business acumen" is simply a talent for borderline-illegal financial piracy; that he's an upstanding member of a "community" that in his mind is restricted to humans of his own socio-economic class; and that among the "traditional family values" he so badly wants to restore to our nation is hatred for all things metahuman, magical or remotely smacking of the 21st century.

So don't be fooled by the angry populist rhetoric or the fear-mongering tactics. Brackhaven is nothing more than the latest in a long line of demagogues, appealing to the voters' worst instincts in order to grab more power over all our lives than any single person should have.

>>>>>[Then there's Bill Ager. Brackhaven's running mate. Conservative Republican, former veep of management for Fuchi, Inc. of America out of New York City. Not as much of a screaming bigot as Brackhaven's rumored to be but alleged to hold a grudge against those of us of the pointy-eared persuasion. When you see where Ager comes from, it's not hard to imagine why he might not like elves too much. Originally from Portland, Mr. Ager and his family got booted off their property following the establishment of Tir Tairngire; they went to live with relatives in New York City.]<<<<<

—Spinner (19:20:34/02-12-57)

>>>>>[This guy Brackhaven scares the living drek out of me. He's somewhere to the right of Attila the Hun.]<<<<<

—Janice (20:31:14/02-12-57)

>>>>>[A lot of what he says makes sense.]<<<<<

—Newt II (14:21:32/02-13-57)

>>>>>[I know—that's what really scares me.]<<<<<

—Janice (21:14:12/02-13-57)

>>>>>[Ager is a guy to keep an eye on, his job at Fuchi America in the Rotten Apple is officially listed as "corporate resources adjuster," which is just a nice way of saying "professional Mr. Johnson" in the arm-pit of the world. For years Ager hired shadowrunners for Fuchi in NYC, and he got pretty friggaling good at it. Carted off some sweet shadowruns against some of Fuchi's competitors that kept him in real good shape with the higher-ups. Word has it that he's partial to the Villiers camp.]<<<<<

—Ladner (06:19:22/02-18-57)

>>>>>[Brackhaven's a friggin Nazi, for Ghost's sake! Just listen to him! All this drek about "family values" and "moral heritage"—it's all jetwash. He's talking about a police state full of happy little brainwashed civvies, with him as the top dog. He's talking about putting all us metahumans into friggin' concentration camps, and people are just nodding their heads and saying "Ya know, he's got a point." What the frag's the matter with people? Can't they see what's going on?]<<<<<

—Bung (18:39:10/02-15-57)

>>>>>[Brackhaven's using a classic "us vs. them" political strategy. He's gathering support by creating a category labeled "good, honest, moral citizens" that most people naturally want to be a part of—cuz if you're not, then you must be bad, dishonest and immoral (like most of us on the board <display grin>). People in the UCAS are scared by the rigging of the election, Bug City and practically everything that's happened since the Awakening. Scared people need something to focus their fear on, and Brackhaven's using that to his advantage. He's putting the blame for the downfall of society firmly on the following "antisocial" elements: metahumans, shadowrunners, magicians, drekcasters. Classic tactics: create a common enemy to unite everyone behind you.]<<<<<

—Caine (01:14:51/02-16-57)

>>>>>[Brackhaven's speech reminds me of one of Prez Jarman's speeches about "The Indian Problem" back in the teens: laying the blame for the country's problems at the feet of a scapegoat.]<<<<<

—Oldbrave (19:01:44/02-16-57)

>>>>>[Tell me this guy can't win. It's just not possible.]<<<<<

—Goblin Boy (15:51:04/02-17-57)

>>>>>[That's what people wanted to believe about Hitler, omae. Truth is, the majority of the UCAS population is human. Certainly the vast majority of the voting population is human. All Kenny-boy needs to do is win them over, and he's doing a frighteningly good job so far.]<<<<<

—Nuyen Nick (20:53:10/02-17-57)

>>>>>[A chummer of mine says Ager really hates elves. I mean hates them. Cuz the Tir kicked him out, probably. My friend says Ager talked to them about a shadow job after getting their names from a list, but he offered to hire them only on the condition that they ditch their mage, Pablo. Pablo just happens to be an elf, and Ager didn't want him anywhere near the biz. Naturally, they told him where he could stick his job.]<<<<<

—Hangfire (22:13:56/02-18-57)

>>>>>[That friggin' Ager is a racist. If he manages to get elected I might just take him out myself.]<<<<<

—Pablo (00:54:13/02-19-57)

ONE PEOPLE, ONE NATION

>>>>>[Another one from the gummint archives. Kenny-boy gave this speech on February 1st, 2057 in Seattle to announce his candidacy for the president of the UCAS.]<<<<<

—Captain Chaos (18:43 12/02-10-57)

Five years ago, we gathered here on the steps of the metroplex capitol to say "no" to affirmative action programs in our city. We stand here today to retake command of the revolution that we began here in 2052, to lead that revolution to victory and into the White House.

Five years ago, I attended a funeral in the Fort Lewis district. The deceased was a young man named Charles Li, brutally beaten and stabbed to death by a gang of goblins on the street. His attackers were never caught because the authorities were afraid to go into the Redmond Barrens after them. The goblins committed a brutal murder, then ran back to their lair to hide. When I returned to Seattle that night, I saw Governor Schultz on CBN, calling for affirmative action programs to give jobs to "needy" metahumans like the ones who killed Charles Li.

What are we doing? What is the purpose of our economy, if not to let laborers and their families enjoy the simple things in life? To let them have food and shelter and a few presents under the tree for Christmas? Isn't that what it's all about? Why are our people not realizing the fruits of their labor?

I'll tell you why: because our government does not listen anymore to the men and women who work in the forges and factories and plants and businesses of this country. Our government cares only for the whims of special interest groups and lobbyist lapdogs who can afford to pay the going rate for a moment of their attention. They have forgotten about the people they were elected to represent, forgotten about the needs of the nation they are supposed to guide.

Well, I have not forgotten about Charles Li, and I am here today to tell him and all the victims like him: when I am elected president of the United Canadian and American States, I'm going to see to it that monsters who murder innocent humans on the street are punished. When I walk into the Oval Office, we start looking out for the UCAS and its people first.

What happened to the idea so eloquently expressed by President MacAlister only a generation ago, of the UCAS as one nation and one people? The men who fought and died at Lexington, Bunker Hill and Saratoga gave all they had to make the land they loved a free and sovereign nation. Yet today our birthright of sovereignty, purchased with the blood of patriots, is being sold for thirty pieces of silver—handed over to these so-called "sub-cultures" of mutations in order to make them more comfortable at decent, hardworking people's expense. I want to see our national birthright—freedom and prosperity—returned to the people who rightfully deserve it.

Rogue nations and worse threaten the sovereignty of the UCAS, yet our government maintains little more than a token army. I will build a UCAS military that is second to none on land, on the seas, and in space—and I will apologize to no one for acting to protect the life and liberty of our people. We will have the security necessary to ensure that tragedies like the destruction of Chicago will never happen again.

What is wrong with our leaders? Why do they care nothing for the collapse of every social value decent people hold dear? Every year millions of social misfits break our laws, cross our borders illegally, and drain away millions in tax dollars from UCAS citizens. Our nation is being eroded by this onslaught of leeches draining us dry, yet our leaders—terrified of being considered "not nice"—do nothing. Let me tell you, my friends, the so-called guardians of political correctness don't scare me. I will do what is necessary to defend my country, even if it means putting freeloaders and anarchists in prison where they belong.

We must win the war for the soul of our nation. Because that struggle is about who we are, what we believe in, and the kind of people we shall become. And that war is being waged every day in every town and schoolroom in the UCAS. When many of us were young, public schools taught children respect for their heritage and the great American values of right and wrong. Our elders taught us about the greatness and goodness of this land we call God's country, in which we all are so fortunate to live.

But today our children are being robbed of their innocence. Their minds are being poisoned against our heritage, against our heroes and our history, against the timeless values of faith and family and country. In our schools, eternal truths have been replaced by moral weakness and disrespect for all the ideals that made our nation great throughout its history. Our children are growing up to become a lost generation with no understanding of their place in history and no pride in their country.

It is said, "What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his immortal soul?" That is true of nations as well. No matter how successful the rebuilding of our economy—our nation's body—may be, it will all go for nothing if we lose the battle for our great country's mind and soul.

Our children are the future of the UCAS, and so we cannot walk away from this battle. If we do, we abandon them to the tender mercies of creatures who butcher young men in the streets of their hometowns. I pledge to you, my friends: I will use the office of the presidency to the full extent of my ability to defend our traditions and the values of faith, family and country from any and all directions. Together we will drive these poisoners of our nation's heart back under the rocks where they belong.

So fight for our future! The UCAS is the seat of one of the greatest civilizations in the history of the world. We possess a proud heritage that we must reclaim from the dust and dirt of years of political corruption and moral decay. If we do, we can pave the way to a new era of greatness—marching forward together as one people, one nation, under God.

• Download the complete multimedia version of Mr. Blackhaven's announcement speech for only 5¥

GHOST STORY: A PROLOGUE

"Brackhaven, you drek-faced bastard, you lied to us!"

Karl Brackhaven calmly regarded the three meters of angry troll towering over him. Kim really had to hand it to him. The guy might be first-rate scum, but he had nerves of steel.

"Lied to you about what, mister Breaker?" Brackhaven asked in a condescending voice that enraged the troll further.

"You're Humanis, you scum!"

Brackhaven just smiled, as if it were a private joke. "I never lied to you about that, my friend—"

"I'm not your friend!" Breaker shouted as slammed his hands down on the desk with such force that he momentarily startled even himself.

"Now you listen to me, you dumb frog," Brackhaven began, almost conversationally. "You were hired to do a job, no more and no less. You didn't come through on your end so you aren't going to see a single nuyen of the fee—a fee you negotiated under the obviously false pretense that you are a group of *real* shadowrunners."

Bone-breaker started to reach for Brackhaven, probably with the intense, single-minded intention of ripping him apart. In a flash the two muscle-grafted goons standing silently behind Brackhaven's desk like twin pieces of statuary had their guns out and trained on the big troll.

"Don't even think of laying your hands on me—you won't live long enough to regret it."

"I'm not afraid of you, poll-boy," Breaker sneered. "Why don't you step out from behind your bodyguards and settle this like a man?"

Brackhaven just laughed, a sound that gave Kim the chills.

"Interesting expression, coming from something like you—'fight like a *man*'—indeed!" Brackhaven took in the three shadowrunners with a single sweeping glance.

"As I said, I haven't lied to you about anything, which I think you would find a refreshing change of pace in your line of work," Brackhaven said. "You were hired to do a job, which you now tell me that you are unable to do. Explain yourselves."

At this, Hood stepped over to Breaker and gently pushed the troll to one side. Kim thought Hood looked like a real elf-land prince sometimes, rather than the Barrens-born and raised shadowrunner that he was.

"You hired us to look into another presidential candidate's background and history without telling us that you represented your nephew, Ken Brackhaven—or telling us that you were the president of the Seattle chapter of the Humanis Policlub," the elf said.

"That is public information. Hardly a secret. Just because you didn't happen to recognize me or my affiliations is not my concern."

"We won't do this job, but we expect to be paid for the time we've invested so far," Hood said.

"You are hardly in a position to negotiate."

"Oh? I can think of several newsnets that would be very interested to learn that the Brackhaven campaign is hiring shadowrunners to do its dirty work."

Brackhaven laughed again. "Do you really think anyone cares about that?" he replied. "Don't you think that everyone of any importance knows that this campaign is no-holds-barred?" He didn't pause to wait for an answer, but kept on talking, as if he were speaking to himself. "Frag them before they frag you, that's basic politics. And if you try to go public with this information, you will disappear into the federal prison system. I will deny any and all allegations, of course. You have no proof to offer, no testimony to give. You don't even exist as far as the rest of the world is concerned and that's as it should be."

Hood started to speak, but Brackhaven just waved a hand and kept right on going.

"If you don't want the job, that's fine. There's no lack of shadowrunners out there looking to make some money and none too concerned about where it comes from. Now get out of here before I have you thrown out."

The elf stood stock still and stared at Brackhaven, not saying anything, just looking him in the eyes. Brackhaven returned Hood's stare without flinching a bit. After several long and drawn-out seconds, Hood turned away from the desk and gestured to the other members of his team.

"Let's go," he said with a glance at Breaker that said he didn't want any arguments. As they headed for the door, Kim turned back.

"There's one thing I want to know," she asked, and Brackhaven looked at her with a raised eyebrow. "Why? Why did you hire metahuman shadowrunners if you're Humanis?"

Brackhaven smiled his maddening superior smile and shook his head. "My dear, because you're the most expendable, of course."

INTRODUCTION

In **Ghost Story**, player characters stumble across a long-held family secret that could effectively end the presidential candidacy of Kenneth Brackhaven. The story begins in a Seattle hospital, where one of the player characters experiences strange visions and encounters the ghost of a murdered ork boy. By contacting one of the doctors who treated the boy, the runners learn of a former nurse who holds evidence of the boy's murder. That nurse can tell the runners that the boy was murdered by his own father, who was ashamed of having sired a metahuman child. And she can also tell them that an impostor was substituted for the child—an impostor who has grown into an influential businessman and is now mounting a presidential campaign that exploits anti-metahuman bigotry. In fact, the murdered ork boy was the real Kenneth Brackhaven.

Of course, as soon as the runners begin investigating the incident, news of their snooping reaches the ears of the boy's uncle, a very important man in his own right and a high-ranking official in the Seattle chapter of the Humanis Policlub. Understandably, this uncle wants to protect the family secret, and so he hires an assassin to kill the nurse before she can reveal her evidence to the runners.

WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE

In 2011, a well-to-do Seattle businessman named Charles Brackhaven and his wife had a son named Kenneth. Mrs. Brackhaven died shortly after the delivery, prompting Charles to cling to his son as a last vestige of the woman he loved.

Young Kenny grew up wanting for nothing material, but his mother's death cast an ever-present strain on his relationship with his father. Over time, Charles came to blame Kenneth for his mother's death. Despite the boy's efforts to please his father, Charles became highly critical of the boy, convinced that Kenneth was unworthy of the sacrifice his mother had made so that he might live. As a result, he began to harshly punish the boy.

In 2023, Kenneth goblinized into an ork—like millions of people all over the world. Charles procured the best doctors and specialists that money could buy to "cure" Kenneth's "condition." Amazingly enough, the boy underwent a rare remission and recovered virtually unchanged.

Sound too good to be true? Well, it is. Actually, Charles Brackhaven saw nothing of Kenneth's pain during his goblinization. Instead, he viewed the change as his son's final failure—a failure that could ruin his own image and career. Determined to prevent his son's condition from damaging his livelihood, Charles arranged for a "merciful" death for his son as he lay in his hospital bed. He then found a suitable SINless orphan who was surgically and psychologically altered to take Kenny's place. That child, conditioned to be the "new" Kenny Brackhaven, became the proper son and heir Charles had always wanted.

The new "Kenny" excelled in school and later joined Charles's business. Under the tutelage of his "father" and "uncle," Karl Brackhaven—the Seattle chapter president of the Humanis Policlub—the young man also learned to blame metahumans for society's ills. When Charles passed away in 2044, "Kenny" took over the family business.

Now, Kenneth Brackhaven is running for the UCAS presidency—armed with his family's money, a considerable education, a reputation as an astute businessman, and the backing of the Humanis Policlub and other archconservative UCAS factions. Observers speculate that Brackhaven stands a good chance of winning—a chance that Uncle Karl and the Humanis Policlub will kill to protect, as the runners will themselves discover.

RESTLESS

In this encounter, one of the player characters finds himself in the hospital where the young Kenny Brackhaven was killed thirty years ago. At first, the character experiences a few strange incidents that can be dismissed as dreams or hallucinations. But soon these incidents escalate into an undeniable encounter with something strange.

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

You lie in your hospital bed listening to the quiet hum of machinery and the distant, quiet movements of the staff. You realize it has grown dark and you lie still, enjoying the quiet dimness, a strong dose of beta-endorphins softly cushioning you from the pain that you know you should be feeling. The warmth, the quiet rhythms of the movements outside and the drugs slowly conspire to lull you into a deep and restful sleep.

Some time later, you stir a bit. Your body feels strange and you think that the 'dorphs must be wearing off. You feel stiff and sore and oddly bent, as if you were wearing a body two sizes too large for you. You stir a bit again and suddenly a soft mass is pushed hard into your face and you awake. You fight and thrash, but the pain in your limbs and the drugs in your system make your struggles tiny, feeble things. You try to cry out, but you can't breathe. Dark spots explode behind your eyes as you fight against the terrible, smothering grip. You grow weaker and weaker and your vision becomes dim. The roaring protest of your blood fills your ears as consciousness slips away from you and you are dragged down into darkness and certain death.

You awaken in a cold sweat, clutching the bed sheets. You're still alive! You let your breath out in a slow, controlled sigh and think how good it is to be able to breathe freely. Just a nightmare. You make a mental note to ask the doc to cut back on the fraggin' drugs he's giving you.

Read the following to the character when the ghost makes contact:

The ork boy glances in your direction with deep, sad eyes that seem to look past you at someone or something standing just behind your shoulder. You gaze to your side, but there's nothing there.

"Father?" he says in a pitiful voice that is far too deep for a child. "It hurts. I'm sorry, please don't be mad. It hurts so much. Make it stop. Please, make it stop." A terrible wall of pain and fear tears through you and the boy seems to really look at you for the first time.

"I'm not a monster!" he yells. "I'm not! I'm just Kenny. Why do you all hate me? Help me, please help me." He starts sobbing and fades away like a mirage.

BEHIND THE SCENES

Gamemasters can run this encounter when one of their player characters checks into Seattle General Hospital to heal up from a problematic shadowrun or to get some new cyber-toys implanted. (See **Debugging**, p. 80, for optional methods of introducing the scenario.) After being in the hospital a few days, the character experiences the dream described in **Tell It to Them Straight**. The gamemaster can introduce the remaining events over the course of a few days or weeks.

If the character tells the hospital staff about the dreams, the medicos attempt to identify a physical cause for them. The staff may tinker with the dosages of the character's painkillers, run all sorts of tests on the character (especially if he's just had any type of headware implantation), and so on. Any such measures have no effect on the dreams. If the character is a metahuman who personally underwent goblinization, have him make an Intelligence (4) Test. If the test succeeds, inform the character that the sensations he feels during the dream resemble those he experienced during the goblinization process. (The goblinization process is never precisely the same for any two individuals, so the character cannot be certain the feelings are the same.)

After the first dream, strange things start happening while the character is awake. For example, the character feels chills in his room despite the steady temperature shown on the thermostat. And small items in the room suddenly fall to the floor for no apparent reason. Then, as the character watches the news one evening, he sees a report on Kenneth Brackhaven's political campaign. The room becomes inexplicably colder and the trid screen suddenly cracks. No hospital staff are ever present when these events occur, and no one can ever offer a satisfactory explanation for these phenomena. If the character becomes paranoid and jumpy, the hospital staff reacts with false sympathy and increased doses of painkillers and sleeping drugs.

Eventually the character actually sees Kenny Brackhaven's ghost, which appears in the form of a young ork boy, about ten to twelve years old, standing in the doorway of the hospital room. The character catches only a glance of the ghost before it disappears. The hospital staff knows nothing of the ghost and no one else sees it.

Finally, Kenny Brackhaven's ghost visits the character during the night. Read the second section in **Tell It To Them Straight** at this time. Make the ghost's appearance spooky and keep the character uncertain as to whether he is awake or still dreaming.

DEBUGGING

It shouldn't be too difficult to arrange for a character to be in Seattle General Hospital for a while. (What? No one in your campaign ever ends up in the hospital? What kind of a **Shadowrun** gamemaster are you?) Seattle General is a real hospital, however—not some chop-shop or street doc—so the character must have a genuine or well-crafted counterfeit SIN. Any player character with an up-to-date DocWagon contract will do.

Encourage the other characters in the group to visit their chummer (unless *all* of the characters happen to be hospitalized after a particularly harrowing adventure). Stage one or two of the waking events while the other runners are present. Another character might spot Kenny Brackhaven's ghost out of the corner of his eye while passing through the lobby or coming out of the elevator. Whatever you do, non-player characters do not see or experience anything connected with the ghost.

If none of your player characters are in the hospital, have a hospitalized non-player character friend of the group (ex-runner, contact, follower, supporter, or an old friend from the neighborhood) contact one of the player characters and describe nightmares that include Kenny Brackhaven's ghost. Then have one or more of the player characters see the ghost while they are visiting their sick friend.

Or simply have the ghost appear in the dreams of a character in the group. In this case, the ghost appears to ork or troll player characters. If no such characters are available, use any player character with a family member who has goblinized. If none of your player characters fits that description, the ghost may appear to a dwarf or elf character. If neither of those are available, the ghost appears to any player character.

Initially, have Kenny's ghost appear in the player character's dreams. Make the dreams painful, especially if the character himself goblinized. The dream should show the hospital and any other hints you want to convey. Make these hints as obvious or subtle as you wish. At the least, the dreams should present a scene that makes even the most hardened runner flinch—a hospitalized boy, goblinizing and probably neglected, or even abused, by the hospital staff. If you want, also include the boy's inattentive father in the dream.

If desired, the adventure can be moved to a different city. However, any new city must be in the UCAS, contain a large city hospital and have been hit hard during the years of goblinization. Wherever the adventure is set, Karl Brackhaven's Humanis Policlub friends will inform him of any investigation into his nephew's background. The players may not get to meet him personally, but they can call him and he will still try to silence them.

Consider the ghost more of a plot device than an actual critter. If the characters attempt to banish or destroy the ghost through astral combat or magic, fling the offending magician into unconsciousness and have him experience the nightmare described in **Tell It To Them Straight**. This happens each time such an attempt is made until the characters get the hint that brute force will not rid them of this haunting. The ghost is totally unaffected by any kind of physical attack, of course.

If the characters simply ignore the ghost, it haunts them with terrible nightmares and weird poltergeist phenomena for weeks, ruining their sleep and making the characters emotional wrecks. The ghost makes any goblinized ork or troll character vividly remember his own transformation. If the characters still remain indifferent to the ghost's overtures, it gives up and moves on after a month or so. A mildly unpleasant astral aura lingers around the characters for a while thereafter (just enough to make astrally sensitive people and all animals edgy and uncomfortable around the characters).

FIND AND SEEK

This section describes some of the information sources that the characters might explore while investigating the ghost's identity. Anticipating every avenue that a clever group of players might try is impossible, so gamemasters should familiarize themselves with the adventure's background and simply improvise any additional information sources needed to keep the plot moving. Gamemasters can also use this section to insert a few red herrings if desired, or to advance their campaigns by adding other scenes and facts unrelated to this specific plot.

ELECTRONIC SOURCES

HOSPITAL RECORDS

Characters can obtain information by decking into the hospital's computer system and searching the hospital records for patients whose physical descriptions match the ghost's appearance. The hospital computer system is pretty standard: Orange 3/8/8/9/8/10 with Trace-5. If the characters have only a physical description, the search turns up hundreds of possible matches. If they add the name "Kenny" or "Kenneth" to their search, they turn up a few dozen matching records. If they add the hospital room number of the character who first saw the ghost, they find a record for a Kenneth Brackhaven, age twelve, who was treated in 2023. The attending physician is listed as "Dr. C. Falt." The remainder of the record is missing. Further investigation reveals that many hospital records were lost during the Crash of '29, so this lack of information is not sinister in itself. Kenny Brackhaven's record does not reveal the reason for his hospital stay.

If desired, gamemasters may create dozens of other records and false leads for the characters to sift through during their search.

PUBLIC RECORDS

If the characters run the name "Kenneth Brackhaven" through a public database or newsnet such as SeaSource™, they receive the information presented at the beginning of this adventure—minus any mention of young Kenny's murder and the impostor, of course.

Public records contain no mention of any ork named Kenneth Brackhaven.

CONTACTS

Characters can learn the following from checking with their various contacts and making appropriate Etiquette Tests. The following tables list the appropriate contacts and the information they can provide.

Kenneth Brackhaven

Business Contacts (Target Number 5)

Any Corporate or Company Man contact.

If a character asks a business or corporate contact about Kenneth Brackhaven, he can learn the following:

Successes	Information
0	"Who?"
1	"Brackhaven? He's that Archconservative guy running for president, isn't he?" (The contact then provides an extensive opinion of Brackhaven's politics and the presidential race in general.)
2	"Brackhaven runs Brackhaven Investments. He took over from his old man a few years back. His Uncle Karl runs a lot of things in town with Kenny out on the campaign trail."
3	"Brackhaven was sick as a kid, but you wouldn't know it to look at him now. He's in great shape and plays real well to the media. A natural for getting into office, if you ask me."
5	"Word says that Kenny-boy and the old man didn't get along when he was a kid, but he came round to his father's way of seeing things. If you ask me, old man Brackhaven had the kid rewired or something to make him daddy's little golden boy. Pops was a control freak and couldn't stand his son not falling into line."

Medical Contacts (Target Number 5)

Street Doc, Medical Corp, Paramedic, and other appropriate contacts.

If a character inquires about Kenny Brackhaven's case or the hospital around the time of the case in 2023, they can learn the following:

Successes	Information
1	"I've heard rumors that the place is haunted—strange lights, visions, spooky drek like that, but nobody really pays much attention to it."
2	"That place saw a lot of traffic when goblinization day hit. It was full of people screaming and dying as they twisted and transformed right before your eyes. It was like a fraggin' war zone. I wouldn't be surprised if rumors of the place being haunted were true."
3	"I've heard horror stories about those days. Hospital staff run ragged and everyone treating the metas like some horrible new disease victims. There was a lot of talk about putting some of them out of their misery and I wouldn't be surprised if it happened."

Magical Contacts (Target Number 4)

Any Magician contact or Talismonger.

Characters can learn the following information by asking an appropriate contact about the nightmares and strange activity or by making successful Magic Theory (4) Tests.

Successes	Information
1	"The phenomena of visions, strange sounds, electrical disturbances and poltergeist effects are generally associated with ghosts. These manifestations can range from harmless displays to very dangerous outbursts."
2	"Ghosts are usually the result of someone who dies violently or with very strong, unresolved emotions. This can leave an astral 'impression' in the place where the ghost died."
3	"Most specters are fairly mindless, endlessly repeating some scenario or task. But some are actually able to communicate effectively, often because the deceased had some important, unfinished task or unresolved issues."
4	"A ghost usually resembles the subject at the time of his death. But some have been known to take on other forms—usually terrible forms designed to frighten the drek out of people."

Doctor Christina Falt

If the characters check Dr. C. Falt's file in the hospital records, they find out that Christina Falt was an intern at the hospital in 2023. She resigned in late November of that year. Strangely enough—as any character with any basic medical knowledge will know—an intern would not normally have been put in charge of any case, though the massive influx of patients during the goblinization outbreak may explain the assignment.

If the characters make inquiries with their contacts about Dr. Falt's current whereabouts, they can learn the following information. Dr. Falt's stats appear in **Picking Up the Pieces,** p. 92.

Appropriate Contacts (Target Number 4)

Fixer, Street Doc, Street Shaman and any street contact or buddy who might have received treatment at Doc Falt's clinic.

MR. BRACKHAVEN, I PRESUME?

Kenneth Brackhaven's presidential candidacy keeps him out on the campaign trail and constantly surrounded by Secret Service agents, so the shadowrunners basically have no chance of meeting him. However, the runners can meet with Brackhaven's Uncle Karl, who oversees Kenneth's campaign in Seattle. Uncle Karl's stats appear in **Picking Up the Pieces,** p. 92.

Successes	Information
0	"Who? Try checking with DocWagon or something, chummer."
1	"Yeah, I've heard of her. Street doc. Pretty good work, too."
2	"She runs a shadow clinic in the Barrens. Doc Fait don't exactly advertise her services on the public dataners, you know. She's pretty selective about who she treats."
3	"Doc Fait usually works through a fixer named Walks-With-Yen. He might be able to get you in touch with her. He uses an e-mail drop at LTG (3124)-5589."

The Brackhaven Seattle campaign headquarters are located downtown in a nondescript office suite that resembles every other corporate office suite the runners have ever seen. The suite's reception area is done in subtle, tranquil pastels, with some comfortable, stylish chairs, a sofa and campaign posters on the walls. A secretary sits behind a broad desk on which sits a standard telecomm and computer set-up.

No metahumans work for the Brackhaven campaign, and none are present in the campaign headquarters. If metahuman runners enter the headquarters, the campaign workers stop their activities and stare. Security personnel in the suite automatically go on alert and notify Lone Star. Campaign security personnel and workers may make rude remarks to metahuman runners, but none will attempt to physically confront the runners.

The security personnel will not allow runners to enter the suite with weapons. If the runners attempt to do so, numerous Secret Service agents and a Lone Star fast-response team appear immediately. Any physical scuffles in the suite elicit the same response. Brackhaven's repugnant anti-metahuman politics, combined with the heightened level of security at the headquarters, can easily lead to violence, and so gamemasters may want to make sure the runners do enough legwork to discover these factors before they visit the headquarters.

Karl Brackhaven is a very busy man, which the runners discover if they attempt to see him at the campaign headquarters. His secretary questions all visitors and admits only characters with the proper political, media or corporate credentials (or very good forgeries) and good cover stories. All others are shown the door by campaign security personnel. If the player characters raise a fuss, Secret Service agents appear and ask them to leave.

If the runners do get to see Karl Brackhaven, they find him to be charming and pleasant. He will pretend ignorance of the whole matter of the ork boy, however. If questioned about the hospital, he will say that Kenneth was seriously ill as a child with an early strain of VITAS, but that he recovered. He will ask the characters about their interest in the whole matter, trying to find out if they are newsnet reporters, but otherwise he will steer the conversation away from the subject. Karl is a smooth talker, but any character who passes a Perception (6) Test can tell that he's a bit nervous about the whole subject. A magician who observes Brackhaven's aura during the conversation and makes a successful Perception (4) Test can tell that he is very nervous and afraid of the runners.

Again, if the characters become belligerent or threatening, campaign security personnel, backed up by Secret Service agents, will attempt to escort them out of the building. Remind any mayhem-minded characters that Lone Star is just a fast-response team away.

If Karl Brackhaven has not already learned that someone is digging into Kenneth's secret past, he certainly knows now. In a rush to cover things up, Karl tries to buy off the runners. Go to **Dead Men Do Pay**, p. 84.

DEBUGGING

If things start to bog down as the characters do legwork, or if the characters begin to lose interest in the investigation and seem ready to give up, throw one or two spooky manifestations of Kenny Brackhaven's ghost their way to encourage them to keep going. If that doesn't do the trick, drop a couple of minor hints that they are on the right track.

If the characters hit a dead end or start planning something foolish like an armed raid against Kenneth Brackhaven or his campaign headquarters, have Karl Brackhaven decide to off them and go to **Shafted**, p. 88.

DEAD MEN DO PAY

At some point, the characters' investigation of Kenneth Brackhaven's background raises some red flags in Karl Brackhaven's mind. This may occur when the runners speak with Brackhaven or earlier, at the gamemaster's discretion. At any rate, Karl begins to worry about just how much the runners know and what they intend to do with whatever information they have found. In this encounter, Karl attempts to persuade the runners to drop their investigation by offering them a little reimbursement.

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

The caller is someone whose voice you don't recognize. He says that he wants to talk to you about a matter that you both might find "mutually profitable," a phrase of which you are particularly fond. He asks you to meet him at a private club called Matchsticks at eleven o'clock if you are interested.

When you arrive at the club, located in the shadow of the towering Space Needle, Saint John the doorman gives you a curt nod and a brief once-over with the flat chrome gaze of his cybereyes before waving you down below street level to the entrance. Apparently, you're expected.

Dark wood paneling and leather and brass accessories adorn the club's dimly lit interior, making it look like a cave. Your eyes adjust and you see a few dozen people scattered around at tables and booths, their quiet conversations nicely covered by the sounds of the jazz combo playing on the low stage. A quick word to the dwarf behind the bar elicits a glance at a corner booth where a lone man sits. He looks like countless other suits that frequent this part of town, the kind of guy you'd have a hard time picking out of a crowd. You make your way over and he extends a hand, keeping the other clearly visible on the tabletop.

"Good evening, won't you sit down?" he asks. "I believe that we have both a mutual acquaintance and a mutual interest."

BEHIND THE SCENES

The man introduces himself as "Mr. Smith" (ah, a surprise!). He tells the runners that his real name is of no importance, but that he has a "few thousand friends" he thinks they might like to meet. He tells them that "the matter of a Mr. Brackhaven" has come to his attention. It doesn't matter how (one must protect one's sources, after all), but it has. He would like the runners to drop their investigation into the matter. The last thing that this Mr. Brackhaven needs at this delicate juncture is people poking around and stirring up trouble needlessly. If the runners agree, Mr. Smith says that they will each receive the access codes for several blind escrow accounts that each contain 5,000 nuyen. If the runners want to up the amount, make a standard Negotiation Test (Mr. Smith uses the Mr. Johnson contact stats, p. 210, **SR II**). Mr. Smith isn't authorized to offer more than 10,000 nuyen per character, however. If the characters become unreasonable or refuse the offer outright, he regretfully breaks off negotiations and asks the runners to leave. Karl Brackhaven then takes more extreme measures to deal with the runners (go to **Shafted,** p. 88).

Mr. Smith's offer is genuine. If the runners take it and keep quiet, they receive no more trouble from Karl Brackhaven (they might even be able to pull in an additional favor from Uncle Karl from time to time). However, accepting the offer also brings the anger of Kenny Brackhaven's ghost down on the runners. The vengeful specter takes out its righteous fury on the runners by haunting them with terrible nightmares, afflicting them with poltergeist phenomena at the most dangerous and annoying moments and generally doing everything in its power to make life miserable for them.

DEBUGGING

If the runners threaten Mr. Smith he coldly advises them against doing anything foolish. If they do anything that suggests impending violence (such as going for a weapon), Mr. Smith's two bodyguards appear out of the woodwork to defend him and Lone Star shows up shortly thereafter (use the Bodyguard archetype stats, p. 49, **SR II**).

If the characters' greed gets the better of them and they take the offer, the adventure isn't necessarily over. Give the runners a taste of how miserable a really ticked-off ghost can make one's life and then give them a chance to re-consider their decision. The ghost cares nothing about the money—the runners can soak Karl Brackhaven and his family for all they're worth if they want—as long as the truth of the whole matter is revealed. If the runners take the money and then decide to double-cross Brackhaven, go to **Shafted,** p. 88.

If desired, Karl Brackhaven may use Fletcher Quinn (see **Shafted,** p. 88 and **Cast of Characters,** p. 91) to keep tabs on the runners even if they accept the offer. In this case, Quinn immediately informs Karl Brackhaven if the characters decide to double-cross him and continue the investigation.

FINDING FALT

Eventually, the runners will want to look up Dr. Falt, who now works out of a clinic in the Redmond Barrens. She will be able to provide vital information that can lead the runners to someone with evidence of what happened to Kenny Brackhaven.

If the characters contact the fixer Walks-With-Yen's e-mail drop and leave an inquiry about Dr. Falt or medical assistance, a few hours later they receive a message asking them to come to the Partyzone in the Redmond Barrens at 1 a.m.

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

You scramble through the ruins of a demolished building and arrive at the Partyzone, several large vacant lots where a crowd of gangers, chip-heads and all manner of assorted street trash party it up to the beat of shag metal blasting from several portable amps scattered about. You make your way warily through the throng and spot a man making his way toward you. He's wearing a dark duster and a broad-brimmed hat and keeps his hands at his sides, clearly in view.

"I hear you're looking for a consultation," he says. "You need to tell me about your symptoms before I can see if the doctor is in."

When the characters go to Dr. Falt's clinic, read the following:

The upper levels of the building contain a noodle shop and a lot of empty rooms obviously being used by a variety of squatters. Walks-With-Yen takes you around the back and down a concrete stairwell to a basement door. He opens the door and steps through. You find yourself in a clean, neat room that takes up most of the basement area, save for what looks like a small office and a storeroom off to one side. The room is set up with a hodgepodge of modern medical equipment, all of it fairly state-of-the-art for a street shop like this one. The instruments look well-cared for and the place is much cleaner than most chop shops you've seen. You might wager that this one is even antiseptic.

A woman emerges out of the office. She's slim and petite with curly red hair heavily streaked with gray. She wears a blue lab coat over a flannel shirt, a pair of jeans and white sneakers stained with blood. She looks weary, but the youthful fire in her green eyes tells you that this is a woman who has held this place together with nothing more than the strength of her will and personality. Walks-With-Yen obviously respects her.

"Dr. Falt, these people need your help." The doctor looks each of you over carefully, weighing what she sees before she replies.

"Always willing to help," she says. "What foolishness have you gotten yourselves into?"

Once the runners have reached an agreement with Dr. Falt, read the following:

The doctor sighs deeply and settles into a swivel chair beside one of the operating tables in her clinic.

"When I first got out of med school," she says, her voice becoming distant, "I was ready to take on the world. I thought I could really make a difference and help to heal people."

"I was an intern at Seattle General when the first wave of goblinization broke out. It was like nothing you can imagine. The hospital became overcrowded within hours, we were massively overworked, and we were afraid. Nobody wanted to admit it, but at the time we had no idea what was happening. There was talk of genetic mutations, bio-warfare agents, new and exotic retroviruses and the like, but we were just guessing. There were thousands of people changing—many of them in terrible pain—but there was nothing we could do. I never felt so helpless.

"I don't remember the boy you describe, but I do remember his father. We had patients piled ten or twelve to a room and this man refused to allow any other patient in his son's room. Paid the hospital big nuyen for that privilege. Dr. Freeman was the attending physician on the case—I think the old man paid for him, too. Freeman was in charge of a research project attempting to develop some kind of treatment for the goblinization syndrome.

"A couple of weeks after the kid was brought in, Freeman announced that there'd been a breakthrough and that the boy's syndrome had gone into remission. No one had ever heard of a goblinization remission, so Freeman got a big grant to perform a study. I was one of the staff people assigned to assist him.

"The project was bogus from the start. Freeman had nothing—no solid data, no viable theories, not even any real evidence that remission was possible. But he did have a new backer—this man Brackhaven. When I raised concerns about Freeman's research practices, I was fired. He went on to become head of services at the hospital and had a very, ah, *lucrative* career.

"I don't know why the records list me as the attending physician, but I wouldn't be surprised if Freeman arranged it in case any questions ever came up about the case. He was an expert at covering his own butt.

"The old slot died about ten years ago, but he had another research assistant, a nurse named Karen Johanssen. The two of them were very, uh, *close*. I lost track of her after I left the hospital, but she might be able to tell you more about what Freeman was up to."

BEHIND THE SCENES

There are no tricks or secret agendas here (for a change). Walks-With-Yen likes and respects Dr. Falt and simply wants to ensure that the characters aren't trouble before he takes them to see the doctor. Telling him the truth is the characters' best course of action, because Walks-With-Yen knows Dr. Falt well enough to know a little of her background. She never talks about the reasons she left Seattle General Hospital, but he knows that she'll probably want to talk to the characters about this matter. Walks-With-Yen also ensures that the characters know that Dr. Falt is a good friend of many of the locals, who would become quite upset if something were to happen to her. Once he is convinced that the runners mean Falt no harm, he calls her on his portable phone to let her know that he is bringing some guests over.

When the characters meet Dr. Falt, their best bet is to be straight with her. She's been on the streets longer than many of them have been alive, and she's seen it all. There's nothing the characters can do to intimidate her and it's very unlikely that they'll be able to put anything past her. She has no patience for posturing or street jive and will tell the characters as much if they try handing her some line.

If the runners tell her the truth of what they're looking for, Dr. Falt asks them some probing questions about what they saw and experienced with the ghost. She also asks them if they have spoken to Mr. Kenneth Brackhaven. If the runners tell her the truth about the nightmare and the appearance of the ghost, she tells them that she does know something about the case. However, Dr. Falt isn't foolish enough to give away for free something that someone else wants so badly. She expects something in return from the characters at some future point. If the runners agree to her conditions, she gives them the story provided in **Tell It To Them Straight**, p. 85.

When Dr. Falt eventually decides to call in her favor, have Walks-With-Yen contact the runners.

DEBUGGING

The only way the runners can really mess this one up is by trying to lean on Walks-With-Yen or Dr. Falt or, worse yet, attempting to harm either of them. Remind characters who get too pushy that Dr. Falt has a lot of friends who owe her favors. These are very *big* friends, some whom even owe her their lives, and these friends will be *most* upset with anyone who does her harm.

If the characters consistently lie to the doctor, she politely tells them to get lost. She refuses to help them unless they relate enough details of what Kenny Brackhaven's ghost has shown them to convince her that they know the truth and sincerely need the information that she possesses.

HELLO, NURSE!

In this encounter, the runners track down Karen Johanssen in an effort to find out what she knows about Kenny Brackhaven and the hauntings at the hospital. They find her unwilling to talk to them, but their visit also tips off Karl Brackhaven that someone else knows the truth.

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

The condoplex on the outskirts of Tacoma looks pretty unassuming. Like a hundred other condoplexes, it has a nondescript beige exterior and a small yard—both are clean and well-maintained. According to your information, this is the correct address for Ms. Johanssen. You make your way up to the front door of her unit, keeping a wary eye on the cars along the street and any movement in the neighborhood as you approach. A firm knock on the door, and it opens a crack to reveal the face of a woman peering out under the security chain. She appears to be in her fifties, has dark brown hair and is wearing a smart gray business suit.

"Yes?" she says, eyeing the group on her porch curiously. "What do you want?"

BEHIND THE SCENES

Once Dr. Fait tells the runners about Johanssen, they can obtain the nurse's address simply by consulting a metroplex telecomm directory from any public phone. A decker can also easily acquire this information. Johanssen is a private care administrator with the Tacoma DocWagon office. She is divorced and lives alone.

Johanssen is understandably cautious when she answers the door. If the runners look especially threatening (the gamemaster makes this judgment call), she may call Lone Star before answering the door. In this case, gamemasters can use the arrival of the cops to cut the conversation short if desired.

If the runners don't look too dangerous and approach the condoplex openly, Johanssen opens the door and asks what they want, as described in **Tell It to Them Straight.** If the runners attempt to lie to her or trick her, the gamemaster must judge the effectiveness of their attempts, based on the information provided in this section. In any case, she is unlikely to reveal anything about the Brackhaven case to them.

If the runners simply tell Johanssen the truth and ask her about Kenny Brackhaven's case, she tells them that she has no idea what they are talking about. She confirms that she worked at Seattle General Hospital at that time, but that she can't be expected to recall the details of a single case from more than thirty years ago. She denies any involvement with Dr. Freeman or any wrongdoing on her part. If Dr. Fait's name is brought up, Johanssen says that Fait was a real troublemaker who always wanted to do things her own way—and that Fait was dismissed from the hospital for her cavalier attitude. If the runners continue to press the matter, Johanssen tells them to go away and leave her alone or she will call the police.

Any runner who makes a successful Astral Perception (4) Test or a Perception (8) Test discerns that Johanssen is keeping something from the runners and is most probably lying about not knowing what they are talking about. Even if confronted with this, Johanssen sticks to her story. If the runners persevere in their accusations, she becomes angry and again orders the runners away from her home.

Unknown to the runners, their investigation into Kenneth Brackhaven's background has made Karl Brackhaven consider the possibility of the loose ends remaining in his nephew's medical history that need to be tied up. Karl has several agents keeping tabs on the runners, and these agents have also learned about Johanssen and her connection to Dr. Freeman. Brackhaven will attempt to use this information as a trap for the runners in **Shafted,** p. 88, and then have Fletcher Quinn deal with Johanssen and her files to ensure that no evidence of Kenny's murder and the switch remains.

WHAT JOHANSSEN HAS

Dr. Freeman was paranoid. He knew full well that his position and considerable personal fortune rested on his knowledge of a murder, child switch and the brainwashing of a young boy. He kept very detailed records of the entire affair on paper (the old fashioned way) as well as on optical disk. He gave Johanssen the disk years ago, as an insurance policy in case his funds were ever cut off.

When Dr. Freeman died, Johanssen received the paper records in a box, which she promptly stored in her attic. The optical disk can be found in a file of her personal papers labeled "SGH Years." Johanssen has never looked through the papers or read the contents of the disk. She did have an affair with Dr. Freeman, but he never described the full extent of his involvement in the Brackhaven case. However, she does know that Charles Brackhaven was behind Dr. Freeman's success, and she knows that the paper records and the disk have something to do with Brackhaven and his son.

DEBUGGING

If the runners try to lean on Johanssen to get information out of her, remind them that they are in a fairly decent part of town and that Johanssen has a PANICBUTTON within easy reach should things become rough. Any attempt by the runners to use magic to get information out of her may also send Johanssen scrambling for her PANICBUTTON. The player characters also should remember that Johanssen may alert Lone Star *before* answering the door, so Lone Star personnel may show up just as the runners are about to lean on her.

Should the runners actually injure Johanssen, assume that a DocWagon trauma team reaches her in time to help. In this case, Fletcher Quinn kidnaps Johanssen from a DocWagon clinic rather than her home (see **Shafted,** p. 88).

SHAFTED

As soon as Karl Brackhaven learns that the runners are investigating his nephew's hospital stay, he hires his own shadowrunner to find out what they're up to—and if necessary, silence them. At some point, Karl decides that it's time for them to die. He may reach this decision if the characters refuse his bribe in **Dead Men Do Pay** (p. 84) or if the runners attempt to blackmail him for more money or double-cross him. Brackhaven is also ruthless enough to arrange their deaths simply to keep things neat and tidy.

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

The directions in the message bring you into an area of the Redmond Barrens that you've seen before, but only in your worst nightmares. The old storefront is in remarkably good shape compared to the other buildings in the area. A faded sign in the window reads "Norton Sporting Goods" and the display behind the scratched and stained plastiglass window consists of some decrepit mannequins wearing the latest street surfing gear—circa 2042, that is. A small sign on the door says that the place is open, but you doubt that the store sells many sporting goods these days.

BEHIND THE SCENES

Karl Brackhaven has hired Fletcher Quinn, a shadow operative of some skill (see **Cast of Shadows**, p. 93), to take care of the runners. If the runners are lucky, they may receive a warning that someone is out to get them: make an Opposed Test between Quinn's Stealth skill and the highest Intelligence of the runners. If the runner achieves more successes, one of the team's street contacts tells them that someone has been "asking about them" recently and warns them to watch their backs. If the runner achieves fewer successes than Quinn, the team walks into this encounter blind.

Quinn has already been tailing the runners for a while when they visit Karen Johanssen. As soon as the runners leave the nurse's home he kidnaps Johanssen. He figures that he can find out if she has any information important to his employer, dispose of any such evidence at his leisure—and use her as bait to trap the runners. After interrogating her, Quinn has a decker friend leave an e-mail message—signed Karen Johanssen—for one of the runners. In the message, "Johanssen" says that she has reconsidered their request and has information they might find useful. She asks them to meet her at a sporting goods store in Redmond. If this lure won't work for some reason, Quinn may try another strategy to draw the runners into his ambush. For example, he may pose as a third party offering the team a new bribe or a new lead.

In any event, Quinn wires the sporting goods store with enough explosives to level the place. Then he finds a comfortable place on a nearby rooftop where he lies in wait, radio detonator in hand and high-powered bow at his side.

The interior of the store contains only wreckage and any material that wasn't interesting enough to loot. Have any character who enters make a Perception (6) Test. If the test succeeds, the character immediately suspects a trap. If any of the characters possesses an active Detect Enemies spell, that runner immediately senses danger when he enters the building.

Quinn detonates the explosives as soon as all or most of the runners enter the store. Any character in the store at the time must make a Damage Resistance Test to resist 10D damage. Impact armor reduces this damage, and characters may use Combat Pool Dice as they attempt to dive for cover from the blast. Any characters standing immediately in front of the store must resist 8S damage. Any character who runs out and away from the building makes it across into the street where the blast knocks him down but causes him no injury.

After the explosives have detonated, Quinn uses his bow to fire at any characters remaining outside the store. He targets the least damaged-looking characters first, then any obvious magicians, followed by troll or ork characters, then heavily armed or cybered characters. If most or all of the characters look like they escaped the explosion unharmed, Quinn attacks only if he reasonably thinks he can take someone out and still get away. As soon as the runners get a fix on his position, Quinn make his way down the building's fire escape to his car and drives off.

DEBUGGING

This encounter is not intended to kill or maim the characters. Use it to shake them up and provide them with some additional incentive to move their investigation along. Give the characters every opportunity to detect the trap and run before it goes off. Don't slaughter them needlessly, but keep the tension level high; force them to escape death by the skin of their teeth.

If the characters don't fall for the trap, the gamemaster may simply have Quinn set a similar ambush elsewhere and attempt to lure them into it in some other way. Quinn continues to tail the characters using all the resources available to him, including his employer's nuyen and his own contacts. Keep all ambush attempts fast and furious and give the characters a chance to escape relatively unharmed.

Fletcher Quinn isn't stupid and he won't try to slug it out with the characters during any ambush attempt. As soon as the runners seem to be on to him, Quinn bolts from his rooftop sniping position and makes a dash to the nearby alley where his car is hidden. Unless the runners take some very quick, clever and decisive action, Quinn should escape every failed ambush attempt.

If a character wants to figure out where the arrows are coming from in order to pinpoint Quinn's position, have the character make an Opposed Perception Test against Quinn's Stealth Skill. If the character achieves more successes, he spots Quinn and can target him with mundane weapons or spells.

If the player characters seem capable of taking out Quinn without missing a beat, make him a more formidable opponent. Increase the hit man's abilities, give him an extra Grade or two of Initiation, provide him with more powers or perhaps a couple of

protective spells (like an Anti-Spell Barrier) locked on to him by one of his mage associates.

If the runners kill Quinn anyway, replace him with another hired gun in **Parting Shot** (p. 90). Use a suitable leg-breaker from your own campaign or the Elven Hitman archetype (p. 206, **SR III**), modified as a human.

FLETCHER QUINN

After this initial attempt on their lives, the characters might want to find out a little about Quinn. They can do so by questioning their street contacts. If they got a look at the kick artist before he escaped, use an Etiquette Test Target Number of 8. If they simply know that the hitter used explosives and a bow, use an Etiquette Test Target Number of 12.

Successes	Information
0	"Who?"
1	"Yeah, I've heard of him. He's a kick artist. That's all I know—and all I need to know."
2	"Fletcher Quinn's pretty good—an up-and-comer. He's professional all the way and usually gets the job done."
3	"I've seen him before. Tall guy with silver hair. Uses a bow and arrows to punch through body armor. He usually doesn't fight you in the open. Prefers to snipe from cover. Ambush is his regular shtick."
4	"I've heard that Quinn uses poison on those arrows of his sometimes. Nasty drek."

PARTING SHOT

In this encounter, the runners must prevent Fletcher Quinn from killing Karen Johanssen and destroying the only existing evidence of Kenny Brackhaven's murder and replacement. After Quinn's ambush attempt, the runners will likely conclude that the hit man has found Karen Johanssen. They encounter him when they return to her condo.

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

Everything at Johanssen's place seems quiet and normal. A firm knock on the door brings no answer. You try the handle and find it unlocked—a bad idea in this day and age, you think. Not the sort of thing that a normally cautious person like Johanssen would do.

You go inside and take a look around. The house is unremarkable, clean and pleasantly decorated. You make your way from the main foyer around the corner into a small living room. There's a small kitchen off to one side and sliding doors that lead out to a small brick patio. A woman is sitting on the couch, her formerly smart gray business suit ripped and torn, her face bloodied. She is gagged and her hands and ankles are tied. She glances up at you with a start and a look of fear in her swollen eyes.

BEHIND THE SCENES

After the ambush attempt in **Shafted,** the runners will likely assume that Quinn knows about Johanssen and her information. They may also assume that Johanssen will be considerably more interested in cooperating with them after a professional assassin threatens her life.

If the runners enter Johanssen's condo, they will find her sitting in her living room, gagged and quite frightened. Allow the runners who first find her to make an Immediate Surprise Test (p. 86, **SRII**) to avoid being caught off guard by Fletcher Quinn. He is accessing the optical disk, making sure the information his employer wants is there, when he hears the player characters enter the condo. He quickly conceals himself and will attempt to ambush the characters again. This time, the heads of his arrows are coated with a deadly nerve toxin that does 6S damage if the arrow causes a Light Wound or worse to a target. (In addition to the poison damage, the arrows also cause the standard damage for arrow attacks.) Characters may use their Body dice to resist the poison damage. Toxin filters also protect against the poison.

Quinn's primary goal in this encounter is to escape with his own skin intact and with the optical disk. He is less prepared than in his first encounter with the runners, so he takes a few more chances and tries to exploit any weaknesses he spotted during that first encounter. He won't fight to the death, however, and attempts to run if he feels overmatched or if the runners gain the upper hand. He almost certainly uses Johanssen as a hostage to aid his escape.

Quinn's secondary goal is to kill Johanssen before she can reveal anything to the runners. If he gets a chance, Quinn expends a Simple Action to kill the helpless Johanssen unless one of the runners attempts to prevent him.

If the runners successfully defeat or drive off Quinn and save Johanssen, she will be most grateful to them, though she still declines to discuss Dr. Freeman and her life thirty years ago. If the runners make a persuasive argument and a successful Charisma (4) Test, Johanssen will break down and reveal that she does have some of Dr. Freeman's old documents, including his personal journal on disk and other materials that she says he kept as "insurance." The information on the optical disk is encrypted, but any runner can crack the encryption with a successful Computer (6) Test.

The optical disk contains Dr. Freeman's medical records for Kenneth Brackhaven's case, including tests and DNA files. The journal contains a confession written by Dr. Freeman that describes fully his involvement in Kenny Brackhaven's death and subsequent replacement. In the confession, Freeman explains that he kept the records as a precaution should Charles Brackhaven decide to kill him. The material conclusively proves that the real Kenny Brackhaven was killed and that the current Mr. Brackhaven is a substitute.

DEBUGGING

The final fight with Fletcher Quinn should be tough but not impossible. Smart characters will have tagged Quinn's MO from their first encounter with him, and they'll be expecting an ambush. If they act quickly and with a little forethought, they should be able to deal with him. If Quinn happens to escape, he may possibly return in future adventures, working for Kenneth Brackhaven or another employer, depending on what the runners decide to do. If he escapes with the disk, Johanssen remembers the box she received right after Dr. Freeman's death. The box contains hard copies of the information on the disk.

The runners should have no real difficulty obtaining the optical disk from Johanssen. It has no real value to her and she is grateful enough to the runners that any decent story will convince her to give it to them. She will want some kind of assurance of safety from the characters (whether they mean it or not). Also keep in mind that any combat between the runners and Fletcher Quinn in this neighborhood attracts the attention of Lone Star, so the runners should not linger at Johanssen's condo after the fight is over.

PICKING UP THE PIECES

Ghost Story can end in a number of ways, depending on the decision the runners make after the final showdown with Fletcher Quinn. Defeating Quinn leaves them with evidence that proves presidential candidate Kenneth Brackhaven is not the genuine article and that his father was not the pillar of the community that some believe. What the runners do with this evidence is entirely up to them. Some possible choices and their resulting consequences are listed here, but gamemasters should be prepared to wing it if the players choose some unexpected course of action.

EXPOSE THE TRUTH

The player characters may decide to expose the truth by taking their evidence to a media contact or newsnet (which would gobble up a juicy bit of muckraking like this with relish). Any of the major newsnets will pay upwards of 100,000 nuyen for the information.

If the runners expose the truth, Kenneth Brackhaven goes on national trideo a few days later and makes a tearful confession to a shocked nation. He says that he has discovered that the story is true, but he claims that he was very, very sick at the time of the events and cannot remember that period of his life. Oddly enough, he is telling the truth. The story generates a firestorm of media interest in Brackhaven, which he uses to tout his political platform. Brackhaven's campaign falters initially but begins to recover quickly.

Exposing the truth also allows Kenny Brackhaven's ghost to rest. The ork boy's ghost appears to the characters one last time in a dream and smiles to them before walking away and fading into darkness.

Finally, the runners' decision makes lifetime enemies of both Kenneth and Karl Brackhaven—so the runners had better hope that Brackhaven doesn't become president.

BLACKMAIL

Less scrupulous player characters may decide to use their evidence to blackmail Kenneth Brackhaven. The evidence could easily destroy Brackhaven's political career, and the candidate can do little to counter a blackmail threat if the characters are reasonably clever. As a result, Brackhaven will be willing to trade money or political favors in exchange for the runners' silence, as long as their requests are not unreasonable (according to the gamemaster's discretion). However, Brackhaven will chafe under such treatment and spend every spare moment plotting to rid himself of the player characters, so runners who go with a blackmail scheme will be riding a tiger.

Additionally, Kenny Brackhaven's ghost will continue to haunt the characters if they go this route. Terrible replays of the boy's death and his various torments will trouble their sleep, and various poltergeist nuisances will afflict them during their waking hours—usually at the worst possible times.

FORGET IT

Alternatively, the runners might attempt to simply forget about the whole matter and remove themselves from any risk by turning the evidence over to Kenneth and Karl Brackhaven in exchange for a promise that they won't harass the runners. Smart characters should know right off that this plan hasn't got a prayer of succeeding. The Brackhavens have no reason to trust the runners and no way of knowing if the characters have copied the disk or possess additional evidence. In fact, the Brackhavens will accept the runners' offer and then discretely arrange the runners' assassinations to eliminate any possibility of the truth ever coming to light.

Additionally, this plan gives no peace to Kenny Brackhaven's ghost, which will continue to haunt the runners in the manner described in **Blackmail**. These hauntings will continue until the runners expose the truth of the matter.

CONSEQUENCES

If the runners choose to blackmail Kenneth Brackhaven or cut some other deal with him, don't have the world come crashing down on them right away. Instead, introduce the consequences of their actions during the course of several adventures. This way, the runners may not immediately discern the connection between their decision and the mysterious assassination attempts and strange phenomena they begin to experience. And after making the runners feel the consequences of their choice, give them a chance to change their minds and do something about it.

AWARDING KARMA

Award Team Karma for the adventure as listed below. Award Individual Karma according to the standard rules (p. 199, **SRII**).

Survival	1 point
Threat	1 point
Getting the goods on Brackhaven	1 point
Putting the ghost to rest	1 point

CAST OF SHADOWS

The following NPCs appear in order of their importance to the story.

KENNY BRACKHAVEN'S GHOST

Kenny Brackhaven's ghost appears as a twelve-year-old ork boy, dressed in typical clothing of the 2020s. He has a sad,

mournful look and tends to avoid other people's eyes. The ghost desires that the truth be known about how Kenny died more than anything and will not rest until that truth is revealed. The ghost is not capable of writing or speaking—it can only show the runners Kenny's terrible fate in the hope that its display will convince them to reveal the truth.

The ghost functions as a plot device rather than a potential opponent for the runners, so it has no statistics. Give the specter any abilities necessary to move the story along. Do not allow the player characters to simply banish it.

KARL BRACKHAVEN

Karl Brackhaven has spent his life protecting a lot of secrets, including his own position as president of the Seattle chapter of the Humanis Policlub. But perhaps more important, he is the only living person who knows that Charles Brackhaven killed and replaced his son Kenneth with an impostor. Karl considers the murder a "mercy killing" and feels no guilt over the matter.

As the new "Kenny" grew, Uncle Karl helped instill in the boy a hatred for metahumans and other "freaks of nature." As a result, Kenneth's candidacy represents the Humanis Policlub's first real chance to elect a UCAS president who completely agrees with many of their repugnant ideals and goals. And Karl will do whatever he can to protect Kenneth's candidacy.

In person, Karl presents a charming and urbane facade. When the need arises, he easily conceals his rabid anti-metahuman prejudice, but generally he is quite outspoken about his opinion that all metahumans are "mutations" that need to be kept apart from healthy, "normal" humans.

Attributes
- Body: 4
- Quickness: 3
- Strength: 3
- Charisma: 5
- Intelligence: 5
- Willpower: 4
- Essence: 5.2
- Reaction: 4

Skills
- Administration: 5
- Car: 3
- Etiquette (Corporate): 5
- Etiquette (Media): 4
- Etiquette (Political): 4
- Leadership: 3
- Negotiation: 5

Initiative: 4 + 1D6
Threat/Professional Rating: 2/2

Cyberware
- Datajack
- Display Link
- Headware Memory (50 Mp)

DOCTOR CHRISTINA FALT

At age 58, Dr. Christina Falt is a world-weary woman who has seen it all: the Ghost Dance War, the breakup of the old U.S.A., the Awakening, goblinization, VITAS plagues, food riots and almost every terrible medical condition known to man. Nothing can shock her anymore. As a young intern out of medical school, "Tina" Falt believed she could make a difference by saving lives, discovering new treatments and improving the lot of patients under her care. All of that changed with the terrible events of the '20s, including Goblinization Day.

At the time of Kenny Brackhaven's death, Dr. Falt was one of more than a hundred doctors at Seattle General Hospital trying to control a condition that no one had ever seen before. She worked long, exhausting hours, then tried to do what she could to ease the pain of the goblinizing patients that filled the hospital wards.

Eventually, Dr. Falt suspected something was amiss with Dr. Freeman's goblinization research project. She went to the hospital administration with her concerns, but her superiors shook their heads and claimed they were powerless to end the project unless Falt could produce evidence to support her accusations. When she pressed the matter, the hospital administrators fired her.

After she left the hospital Dr. Falt entered private practice. Eventually her practice collapsed, however, under increasing competition from corporate HMOs such as DocWagon. Unwilling to end her career as a healer, she stepped into the shadows and opened a "private clinic" for patients with "special" medical needs—namely, the need to keep their treatments secret. She has gained quite a reputation as a street doc, but few people know about her background because she prefers not to talk about it.

Attributes
- Body: 2
- Quickness: 3
- Strength: 2
- Charisma: 4
- Intelligence: 6
- Willpower: 4
- Essence: 5.1
- Reaction: 4

Skills
- Biotech: 8
- Cybertech: 4
- Car: 2
- Etiquette (Corporate): 2
- Etiquette (Street): 4
- Negotiation: 3

Initiative: 4 + 1D6
Threat/Professional Rating: 1/3

Cyberware
- Blood Filters (3)
- Datajack
- Display Link

FLETCHER QUINN

Fletcher Quinn is a respected kick artist, or hit man. A consummate professional, Quinn is highly devoted to his "art." He treats each job as an intellectual exercise, and he plans and performs each assignment with clinical detachment. He bears the player characters no malice—he views them as no more than this week's targets.

Quinn lives by the adage "discretion is the better part of valor." He never stands and fights against unreasonable odds. He performs his work patiently, and he is always willing to take the time needed to do a job right without exposing himself to unnecessary risk.

Though Quinn is well versed in a myriad of armed and unarmed fighting styles, he prefers to minimize his personal risk by carrying out his jobs using fairly indirect means, such as explosives, poisons and the like. His weapon of choice is a modern compound bow that packs more punch than a gun and easily penetrates modern anti-ballistic body armor. (On occasion, arrows from his bow have even foiled "anti-bullet" spells). Often, he coats the tips of his arrows with drugs or poisons to ensure quick, clean kills.

Attributes

Body: 5
Quickness: 6
Strength: 5
Charisma: 3
Intelligence: 4
Willpower: 5
Magic: 6
Essence: 6
Reaction: 5

Skills

Car: 3
Chemistry (Toxins): 5
Demolitions (Anti-Personnel): 4
Etiquette (Corporate): 4
Etiquette (Street): 4
Firearms (Pistols): 5
Projectile Weapons (Bows): 8 (10)
Stealth: 6 (8)
Unarmed Combat: 6

Initiative: 5 + 3D6
Threat/Professional Rating: 5/2

Gear

Armor jacket
Colt Manhunter
form-fitting body armor
Radio detonator
Ranger-X Compound Bow w/30 arrows
Various explosive devices

Adept Powers

Enhanced Senses (Vision Magnification 2)
Improved Projectile Weapons (2)
Improved Stealth (2)
Increased Reflexes (2)
Missile Parry

DUNKELZAHN

PARTY AFFILIATION: INDEPENDENT
"DUNKELZAHN FOR PRESIDENT"

>>>>>(The following material was posted to Shadowland in February of 2054. I dug it out of the archives because it provides useful background on the "Big D." Read carefully, chummers, cuz there's a chance the wyrm might actually be running the UCAS after this election. The profile is excerpted and abridged from the far-too-hip-for-its-own-good online edition of the infozine MetaTrends (January 2054). Some of the information has been disputed by various sources, so believe at your own risk. As always, readers are invited to post their own comments and observations—I left in the posts from '54 that seemed pertinent. Believe them at your own risk as well.)<<<<<

—Captain Chaos (08:21:51/3-16-57)

If dragons are beasts of legend, why is it that modern man can periodically flip to a cable channel and find one alternately babbling about some fascinating (to him) facet of human society or having a good-natured chat with the celebrity of the moment? Why does a dragon, once the bane of Saint George, nowadays have his own talk show? Simple: ratings and power.

>>>>>(When a great dragon asks for his own trideo show, are you gonna tell him no?)<<<<<

—X-VP (02:13:13/2-26-54)

>>>>>(If a great dragon decides to run your country, are you gonna tell him no?)<<<<<

—SPD (11:19:23/3-16-57)

Dunkelzahn first appeared in Denver on January 27, 2012, only weeks after the first modern dragon sightings. Even as the military tried to seal the area around Cherry Creek Lake where the great dragon snoozed, reporters from all over the globe fought for an interview with this strange new being. Anchorwoman Holly Brighton won the contest, and the resulting interview—twelve hours and sixteen minutes of mind-boggling questions and answers between Brighton and the towering dragon Dunkelzahn—gave humanity its first real clue to the breadth and depth of the Awakening. Even though Dunkelzahn was amazed and bewildered by the strange world into which he had awakened, the dragon still had enough savvy to insist on a cut of the profits from the sale of the interview tapes. It is estimated that those sales alone netted the dragon more than $13 million dollars—tax-free

Not long after the historic Brighton interview, Dunkelzahn hooked up with the first of his three (to date) "interpreters." Though the dragon quickly learned to communicate in English (with the assistance of magic), getting his comments recorded on videotape proved a tremendous task. Dragons, we soon discovered, do not "speak" as humans do; instead, they communicate via a "thought-voice" clearly understandable by all those to whom a dragon chooses to speak. Unfortunately, microphones turned out to be immune to thought-speak. The solution appeared in the unlikely form of a local Denver resident, a young man named John Timmons, who agreed to "speak" for the dragon by relating the words Dunkelzahn spoke into his head.

Though Dunkelzahn maintained a business relationship with Holly Brighton until her retirement in 2042, for years Timmons remained the dragon's voice in the media and in public. In return, Timmons' own words became a major force in the post-Awakened Protestant revival in North America. Timmons preached tolerance and clear thinking against a tide of religious reactionism, an unusual position in the newly Awakened world full of frightened and bewildered people.

Timmons' relationship with the dragon ended in 2022 when the interpreter was killed by a assassin with connections to the burgeoning anti-metahuman movement. Police could not question the killer; he had made the mistake of taking his shot in Dunkelzahn's presence and paid for it with his life. Eyewitnesses reported that the dragon reduced the gunman to his "component flaming atoms" with a glance. Critics of the dragon's act raised a harsh question: why, with all his power, couldn't Dunkelzahn have stopped the assassination from occurring? The usually verbose dragon made no comment at the time and remains silent on the matter.

>>>>>(That's cuz he arranged for the head shot. Timmons had been a valuable mouthpiece, but he was starting to feel his power as a leader in the chaotic post-Awakened Protestant movement. Word is that he was preparing to end his relationship with the dragon and reveal all.)<<<<<

—Gossip Hound (08:22:09/2-24-54)

>>>>>(This is a fraggin' great dragon we're talking about! First off, you don't think he could have kept Timmons quiet if he'd wanted to? (Assuming there was a reason to do that in the first place.) Second, if you're one of the most powerful magical beings on the planet, why rely on some goon with a cheap hunting rifle? Timmons nearly survived, you know.)<<<<<

—Untouchable (11:28:42/3-1-54)

>>>>>(What, dragons don't know healing magic??)<<<<<

—Doctor Dave (10:19:27/3-5-54)

Dunkelzahn remained without a "voice" until 2028. In the spring of that year, the dragon began speaking through a young woman named Terri Ann Riberio. Like Brighton, Riberio was a neophyte reporter when the dragon "discovered" her. Perky and personable, Riberio proved popular enough to launch a successful, if not critically noteworthy, acting career in 2030.

>>>>>(Interesting that Riberio has to date refused—despite offers of tremendous sums of money—to create a tell-all program about her years with the dragon, let alone be interviewed about the subject. Integrity, or something else?)<<<<<

—Publisher (03:17:15/2-26-54)

>>>>>(A manuscript on the subject does exist, I understand. Riberio keeps it as insurance: if she dies under "mysterious circumstances," it goes public. A common and usually successful technique. Of course, should Dunkelzahn find it ...)<<<<<

—Winner (12:01:57/3-1-54)

>>>>>(I bet the Big D would like to get his paws on that manuscript now. Something like that could really mess up a successful political campaign.)<<<<<

—Iolniver (14:54:13/3-22-57)

During the five years prior to hooking up with Terri Riberio, Dunkelzahn spent vast sums to create his current "lair": a sprawling retreat on the shores of Lake Louise in the Athabaskan Council, southwest of Edmonton. The dragon's estate serves as a tourist attraction and high-technology entertainment resort as well as the dragon's personal domain. Though the legal basis for Dunkelzahn's claim to the land remains unclear, there is little doubt that the great dragon is lord over all he surveys.

The resort's technological wonders are created and operated by VisionQuest, a former Ares Macrotechnology VR lab purchased by Dunkelzahn in 2037. The dragon seems fascinated by the concept of virtual reality, its applications and implications. Dragons, he is quoted as saying, have a unique understanding of reality, and so anything that claims to create or define reality is of great interest to him.

>>>>>(I've heard that Dunkelzahn attempted a direct neural-tap VR feed with no success. Guess he's stuck using those stupid archaic helmets and gloves. Quite an image, eh?)<<<<<

—Bowman (07:26:30/3-1-54)

>>>>>(The dragon's purchase of VisionQuest is interesting, too. Nobody is really sure why Ares would sell off such a cutting-edge subsidiary to an unknown like Dunkelzahn.)<<<<<

—Stock (13:3 12/3-20-57)

>>>>>(Like we keep saying—a great dragon wants to buy or do something, you gonna tell him no?)<<<<<

—SPD (20:14:53/3-23-57)

>>>>>(No! That simple. A megacorp outclasses a great dragon by far. Ares didn't sell off VisionQuest out of fear—it's a sure bet Damien Knight got something more than nuyen out of the deal. They say never cut a deal with a dragon, but if anyone could do it and come out on the winning side, it's Knight.)<<<<<

—MrsKnight (02:13:20/3-26-57)

The dragon's current "voice" is Nadja Davlar, an Eastern European elf with a mesmerizing voice and no personal history on

record. She has served the dragon since 2039 and reigns over the Lake Louise resort like a queen. Holly Brighton, who lives at the resort and still wields considerable power within the dragon's sphere of influence, is frequently at odds with Daviar. Brighton's greatest influence seems to be over Dunkelzahn's periodic talk-commentary trideo program, "Wyrm Talk."

>>>>>(I've heard rumors that Daviar has some connection to the Polish intelligence community, though no information beyond that has ever surfaced. I'll bet Brighton would pay mucho dinero for that kind of paydata.)<<<<<

—Ex-Pat (03:02:09/3-12-54)

>>>>>(No personal history? Has anyone out there got anything on Daviar? Who is she? Where did she come from?)<<<<<

—Curious George (20:11:30/3-20-57)

>>>>>(Sorry, George, but there's nothing to be found. I know some people who've looked real hard. Daviar's more than just the average SINless-type—someone's taken great pains to erase any traces of her background and done a damn fine job of it, too.)<<<<<

—Sweeper (02:13:45/3-29-57)

The dragon began the semi-annual program the year following Brighton's retirement from media and has so far produced more than two dozen editions. Topics range from trite celebrity interviews and profiles to frighteningly insightful commentaries on culture and society.

>>>>>(Dunkelzahn used his talk show to announce his candidacy to an estimated trideo audience of more than 300 million viewers worldwide. The announcement stunned the world with its implications, but the UCAS has recognized him as an official candidate (After all, who wants to tell a great dragon no?))<<<<<

— Captain Chaos (15:23:04/3-20-57)

>>>>>(Okay, I'll bite. Why is he doing it? Why is a great dragon running for fraggin' president?)<<<<<

—Bung (20:18:22/3-21-57)

>>>>>(Why is Lofwyr in charge of Saeder-Krupp? Why are dragons influencing the government of Amazonia? Why did Aden destroy Tehran? Why did Simurg destroy EuroAir 329? Power, chummer, pure and simple. Dragons like to have power and to be in charge.)<<<<<

—Eastman (18:04:30/3-22-57)

>>>>>(But Dunkelzahn's not like that. He doesn't throw his weight around or play "me dragon, you puny human." I think he genuinely likes us and really wants to help us out. I'm on the stage crew for "Wyrm Talk" and I've actually worked around "the Big D" (as we call him on the set). He's one of the best people I've ever worked with. He's genuinely interested in us, more than any human boss I've ever worked for. He's got my vote.)<<<<<

—BestBoy (19:56:19/3-24-57)

Wyrm Talk WITH DUNKELZAHN

A *MetaTrends* special transcript of the historic March 15th, 2057 broadcast.
Commentary by Colin Carter

Dunkelzahn the great dragon is the size of a small building, but he sits almost catlike atop the special platform built for him in the sound studio, as comfortable as if he were lying on the stereotypical pile of booty so popular in cheap fantasy novels. A raven-haired elven beauty stands at his side, looking too calm to be a maiden in distress: his translator, Nadja Daviar, who serves as the dragon's voice to the audience of his tremendously popular talk show. Unlike most of his kind, Dunkelzahn doesn't shun the spotlight. He seems to love the attention, which is probably why he looks like the cat that swallowed the proverbial canary as the cameras slide into place and the dragon's old friend Holly Brighton adjusts her feed to the studio systems. She's come out of semi-retirement to interview what may well be the most unusual guest that the great wyrm has had on his show yet: himself.

The sense of anticipation in the air is crackling like electricity as the studio manager makes the final checks and begins counting down to air time. Dunkelzahn insists on performing his programs live in front of a studio audience, a practice largely abandoned in trideo programming decades ago. The rows are packed with people on the edge of their seats, waiting to see what will happen. I understand from the producer that Dunkelzahn personally invited most of the audience to attend this show, though they seem to represent a fairly broad cross-section of the viewing public. Whatever you may say about the dragon, as I sit here in the studio and feel the anticipation building, I've got to admire his showmanship.

The studio manager signals on-air. The show's credits roll on the monitors. The audience applauds as the cameras focus on the

stage. Holly Brighton crisply introduces herself and her "guest," then settles into a comfortable, conversational tone.

HB: The first question I'm going to ask is the obvious one. Why are you guest-starring on your own talk show?

Well, Holly, I've decided to run for president of the UCAS. I intend to "throw my hat into the ring," as it were.

[The studio audience is stunned into silence by the announcement, made in Daviar's steady, sweet voice. Everyone's attention is riveted on the dragon. I can't help but think of the millions of viewers out there glued to their video sets.]

HB: Dunkelzahn, I'm sure our viewers must find this announcement quite a surprise. Why do you want to run for president? What possible reason could you have?

[A rich laugh] There are many answers to that question ... and I'm sure that you and all these good people [a nod toward the studio audience] have heard most of them. My reasons are different. [A slight pause, as if the dragon is searching for words. Surely a master showman like Dunkelzahn must have planned out his spiel to the letter—but the brief hesitation doesn't feel faked.] I am an ancient being, Holly. I've seen first-hand more history than many shorter-lived people have forgotten. And in all that time, I have seen many civilizations attempt to create a better world—and tragically few that succeeded. One of those, the only one that still survives, is the United Canadian and American States. In all of its incarnations since the U.S. and Canada were formed, this nation has achieved remarkable things. Think of it—over the past three hundred-odd years, you have managed to create and sustain a civilization based not on shared blood and cultural conformity, but on shared ideals. On the rule of law. On the notion that all beings truly are created equal, before which the many differences between us fade into insignificance. This is an extraordinary premise on which to build a way of life—yet you have done it, and are doing it still. Certainly, you have not always lived up to this ideal—like any young civilization, you have backslid, fallen short, sometimes even given up. But you have always tried again to be the great civilization that you instinctively know you can be. I wish to aid in this effort—by leading you in the direction toward which you have always striven. This nation and all its people have so much strength, so much potential for true greatness. I can make that potential a reality. I can guide the UCAS—and through the UCAS, the world—to become what it was meant to become.

HB: You said we had built our society on "the notion that all beings truly are created equal." I take it that means you support civil rights for metahumans?

As one who lately benefited from the wise decision to grant a non-human equal rights under the law, I would be inconsistent not to. [Brighton laughs politely.] But it goes deeper than that. Many people in the UCAS today lack civil rights, because they also lack any meaningful connection with the country in which they live. Human and metahuman alike, they are disenfranchised from the society around them—they have little hope, and even less opportunity. I intend to change that. The UCAS I want to lead is one in which every citizen has a stake in the future, because the destiny intended for it belongs to all of its people. Therefore, if I am elected, I will make System Identification Numbers available for all the SINless in the UCAS. National registration, with complete one-time amnesty for all who may be here illegally or who cannot obtain a SIN under normal circumstances because of some petty offense. All who wish to become full-fledged citizens of their own country may do so, with no questions asked.

HB: What would you say your qualifications are for this job? I mean, you're not a politician and you have no experience in government. Or do you?

No. No. I'm not a politician, which is a good thing. The times in which we live require new solutions, not more of the same old ones. To create a future worth having, we require innovation—in politics, in economics, in technology—especially in technology. Most of all, we need the one thing at which the UCAS has always excelled—innovations in thinking, a willingness to look at the world in new ways. This nation has always had the courage to do that, and I am confident that under my guidance the UCAS will reach new heights of creativity.

HB: What exactly do you mean by innovations in economics and technology? And why especially technology?

Let me give you an example, Holly. Conventional wisdom has it that the so-called Big Eight megacorporations are the driving force behind technological development—that they are the ones "pushing the envelope," so to speak. In fact, they are quashing development, both technological and economic. These vast companies use their enormous resources to maintain a status quo that they find profitable. Real innovation is too risky for them—it frequently loses money, or has no immediate practical benefit. A giant corporation cannot explain to all of its shareholders that they will be getting less money this quarter because funds were spent on something with no immediate profit, and so the megacorporations back only the sure winners. It's the smaller companies and ordinary individuals who are willing to take great risks for apparently small gain, to gamble on something that may not pay off for years. These are the true heirs of the American-Canadian drive to succeed by inventing a better mousetrap. And in the end, the common people—not the megacorporations—will be the ones whose hard work and dedication improves the quality of life for everyone. With the proper guidance, of course.

HB: Whenever someone becomes a candidate for president, people start picking apart that person's character and qualifications. How do you feel about the prospect of your past coming under scrutiny?

I take pride in my origins, but as U.S. Army General Colin Powell said many years ago, "We're Americans. We're not Africans and we're not Jamaicans. We have to live in this country in this time." I am a UCAS citizen, first and foremost. I do not live in the past. My interest is in the future, and I am uniquely qualified to guide the nation for its greatest good in the years to come.

HB: Why is that?

The Awakening has changed the world in many ways. Many people want to return to the past before magic—or dragons, for that matter—existed, but wiser heads know that the changes we have been through cannot be reversed. As a dragon, I understand the forces of magic better than anyone. I understand magic's strengths and its limits. As an ancient being with a unique understanding of history, I also appreciate the strengths of modern-day technology because I have witnessed the development of so many civilizations without it. I have made a point of studying high technology since the world Awakened, and I understand what ongoing technological innovation can do for us. Technology can help us achieve wonders unmatched by any other civilization that has ever existed. Magic has its part to play, of course, but technology can take us farther in the direction we are meant to go.

HB: Do you really think the people of the UCAS can accept a non-human as their president? Will people really follow a dragon as their leader?

I do not concern myself with matters of species or race. Ask me what I am and I will tell you. Ask me where I came from, I'll tell you. Let others call me too traditional or not traditional enough or too human or not human enough in my thinking. Meanwhile, I will do what I know is right. I will act for the good of all, and give the UCAS the future it was meant to have. Those with the wisdom to join me, I will welcome ... and those without it must simply wait and see. They will find little to quarrel with when all is said and done.

HB: If you became president, what could you bring to this country?

I could say the usual things—job opportunities, respect in the world, social justice for the oppressed, and everything else a politician usually says. And all those things will come under my guidance, of course. But what I have principally to offer is hope. I know what the people of the UCAS are capable of, and I know exactly how to ensure that this nation lives up to its potential. Under my leadership, the UCAS can become again what it has been in the past—a beacon of hope for the rest of the world, a shining example of what the races of (meta)humanity can achieve if only they are pointed in the right direction. Together we can work miracles—and we will.

HB: Do you think people will actually vote for you?

I believe they will. Their choice is simple—the future I offer them, or no future worth having. Of all the candidates, I am the only one who truly believes that ordinary people have a role to play. Indeed, I'm counting on legions of ordinary people to recognize this chance to achieve something worthwhile—to work toward a world no longer hobbled by poverty, injustice, and despair. Common people dream great dreams, Holly, and they never quite give them up. I believe the people of the UCAS are ready to join me in this great enterprise, to make a new future for themselves. And I am prepared to lead the way into that future—whatever it takes.

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DRY RUN: A PROLOGUE

Simple run, my butt, Tanner thought as he slammed a fresh clip into his Predator and listened for any sound that might betray the locations of the feds in the underground garage. Marley was already crouched down against a car, trying to work the fingerings of a spell to heal the flesh wound in her shoulder. Half-Trak stood at the other end of the car, both hands wrapped around the grip of his Colt.

"This is the Secret Service," said a bullhorn-amplified voice. "You are under arrest. You have thirty seconds to throw down your weapons and come out with your hands behind your heads. If you do not comply we will respond with force."

Trak turned to Tanner as Marley cursed faintly and finished working her spell. "We're fragged, chummer," the dwarf whispered. "We haven't got any choice."

Tanner looked back across the car at Trak. *No choice.* They were pinned down inside the garage by the feds with no way out. They hadn't heard from Sprite, so they had to assume the decker was out of action. Either she had cut her losses or the IC in the fed matrix had skragged her—at this point, Tanner didn't really care which.

"You have ten seconds," came the voice again.

"Let me try a spell," Marley whispered, pushing herself up. Tanner shook his head.

"They've got to have magical backup by now. You'll only give them an excuse to geek us."

"You think they won't anyway?" she replied, her sarcasm edged with pain.

"If we play our cards right, maybe not." Tanner looked at Half-Trak, who nodded in agreement, then back to Marley. Frowning, the mage considered their chances against an armed UCAS government squad that undoubtedly had reinforcements on the way. Then she nodded silently.

"Okay, we're coming out!" Tanner shouted. He tossed his Predator to one side of the car and straightened up slowly with his hands behind his head, hoping that the feds wanted them badly enough not to simply shoot them when they stood up.

Tanner's vision started to swim. Panic gripped him as he realized his limbs wouldn't obey him. Everything went black and silent, and Tanner's mind started racing. Was it a spell from the fed mage? Some kind of nerve gas? What the frag was happening?

Suddenly Tanner found himself awake and lying in bed. Not his bed, though. Some kind of hospital bed. He started to sit upright and just had time to notice Marley and Trak lying in identical beds before an ork in a white coat pressed a switch on the side of his bed rail. He felt a comforting, relaxing warmth spread through his muscles as he fell back against the pillows and stared at the ceiling.

After watching for a moment to make sure his subjects were resting easily at the lowest level of consciousness, Dr. Tronsa crossed the room, punched a two-digit number into his telecom

and pressed the Call key. Almost immediately, the picture on the screen flickered and resolved into the face of Carla Brooks.

"Report."

"They made it farther than the last group, Ms. Brooks, and—"

"But not far enough. Okay, give them the standard debriefing and have the techs reset the simulation with the new information as soon as the results from this run have been processed. I'll arrange for another team to make the run—expect the new group in three days."

"Ms. ... Ms. Brooks, is my work producing satisfactory progress? I don't like calling only to report qualified failures ... "

"I understand your concern, doctor, but each test provides valuable data for analysis—and each test gets us a little closer to our goal."

"How many simulations do you plan to run?"

"As many as we need to. We have to make sure this is done right, Dr. Tronsa. There is no margin for error. Don't worry—everything is going according to plan."

As he pressed the Disconnect key, Dr. Tronsa allowed himself a moment's speculation on the parameters and expected outcome of his superior's mysterious plan. As quickly as the thought arrived, he forced it away. Best not to inquire too closely into the purposes of those employed by dragons.

INTRODUCTION

In **Dry Run**, the runners are hired to perform an apparently routine shadowrun by Carla Brooks, head of security for the great dragon Dunkelzahn's presidential campaign. Unknown to them, their "shadowrun" is actually a test run of a scenario designed and executed in a highly sophisticated virtual reality. The runners believe they are on a shadowrun in the real world but are, in fact, hooked up to powerful computer systems at a VisionQuest VR facility that Dunkelzahn owns. After completing their run, the runners awaken from the VR simulation to discover that Human Nation terrorists have taken control of the VisionQuest facility and plan to destroy it. Unless the runners can find a way out in time, they are dead meat.

Dry Run assumes that the runners work out of Seattle, but the initial encounter can be set anywhere.

DRAGON DREAMS

Always fascinated by humanity, the great dragon Dunkelzahn has made a hobby of examining the quirks and foibles of homo sapiens for quite some time. In recent years, Dunkelzahn has come to rely on the inventions of simsense and virtual reality as his best tools for the study of the human condition. These technological wonders allow the dragon to invent all manner of interesting scenarios at his Lake Louise virtual theme park, then observe and record all the reactions of human subjects introduced into these scenarios. The dragon can then view, study and even experience his subjects' responses at his leisure.

To further his experiments with virtual reality, Dunkelzahn purchased VisionQuest, a leading-edge VR company previously owned by Ares Macrotechnology. Under Dunkelzahn's direction, VisionQuest became a workshop in which the dragon turned out the state-of-the-art VR programs and scenarios he needed to satisfy his curiosity about the metahuman condition. VisionQuest's virtual-reality programs are so sophisticated that users frequently cannot differentiate the virtual from the real world.

In **Dry Run**, Dunkelzahn's VisionQuest employees have constructed a VR scenario that simulates a shadowrun—a "dry run" that the player characters are tapped to test. To ensure untainted test results, Dunkelzahn has decided to keep the subjects unaware that they are undertaking a simulated run. To achieve this, Dunkelzahn's agents will drug the runners early in the shadowrun so that they awaken in the simulation with no knowledge that what they are experiencing is not entirely real.

Dunkelzahn and his trusted employees have already tested this scenario on several different shadowrunning teams to provide the most complete data possible. The player characters are not the first to go on this run; however, theirs is the first test to be interrupted by a terrorist assault (aren't they lucky?).

REALLY UNREAL

Because most of **Dry Run** takes place in virtual reality, the gamemaster must consider several unique factors. These factors can affect how the scenario plays out, as well as how "real" the whole experience feels to the shadowrunners. **Virtual Realities 2.0** may be helpful, though not essential, when incorporating some of the concepts mentioned in **Dry Run**.

VisionQuest has created one of the most sophisticated virtual reality environments in the world using the most advanced modeling and design techniques plus terapulses of recorded sense impressions and other data. However, the simulation is not entirely flawless. As they go through the shadowrun, the runners will likely notice a few hints that things are not as they should be. What they make of that information is up to them.

Running in Fantasy Land

Generally speaking, in virtual reality the characters' bodies respond to their neural impulses exactly as they do in the normal world. The simulation's VR controller uses an active neural feedback system similar to those used in cyberdecks. The controller translates the runners' neural impulses into actions within the VR environment. If a runner thinks about shooting someone, casting a spell or dodging a hail of bullets, his or her virtual self takes that action. The system works quite well to make events unfold as the runners expect them to.

In fact, it works a bit *too* well. Because the system reacts to the runners' neural impulses, the runners' *expectations* of what is going to happen create a slight bias in their favor within the simulation. Test results are adjusted to mitigate this bias, but the phenomenon can make for some odd coincidences while the runners are experiencing the VR simulation. Pay careful attention to the attitudes expressed by both the runners and their players during the game. If a character or player expresses a strong opinion about the outcome of an event or test, modify the test result by altering the size of the dice pool in accordance with the opinion expressed.

For example, if a runner or player says that making a specific shot is a sure thing, that runner might gain a bonus die or two when making the test for that action. If a runner or player is convinced that the action will fail, he or she may lose one or two dice as a penalty. In virtual reality, attitude really *is* everything. Use common sense when modifying test results and do not add or subtract more than a couple of dice for any test. Keep all test modifications secret from the players; let them wonder why their Success Tests are turning out differently than they usually do.

Something's Wrong Here

The VR simulation is incredibly real, but occasionally it displays minor "glitches" that the runners may notice if they are paying attention (as good shadowrunners should). Rather than having

the players make continual Perception Tests to notice these glitches (thereby letting them know that they should be noticing something), simply insert small, slightly surreal details into descriptions of the runners' surroundings. An example of this appears in the **Tell It To Them Straight** section of **Off and Running** (p. 104), where the runners' view of DeeCee seems "not at all like the real Federal District of Columbia—more like one of those documentaries you see on the trid." The runners can easily dismiss this passing detail as the result of fatigue or an overactive imagination. Alternatively, a cold, cough, nagging pain or other minor physical problem might bother a character less than usual ("Lucky thing your trick knee's doing okay today.") Or minor details may appear somewhat idealized or "unreal" in some way—colors may seem a little too bright, outlines a little too sharp. A magician character may get an odd feeling or impression while doing magic or assensing, which the character may chalk up to unfamiliarity with DeeCee's "vibes"; in truth, the VR system has a little problem simulating magical activities because they cannot be sense-recorded. Decker characters may sense some slight quirk or time lag in decking, which they may attribute to some peculiarity of the DeeCee matrix. In fact, the quirk comes from the decker's finely honed awareness of virtual reality; he or she is subconsciously noticing the difference between his or her normal deck interface and the VR program.

Hitting the Wall

The virtual-reality simulation also has a few "blind spots" that will tend to unravel the scenario—things it cannot simulate accurately. If the simulation runs into one of these blind spots, it tries to compensate as best it can—usually by taking the affected runner out of the scenario to preserve the illusion for the remaining characters.

The program's major blind spots are injury and death. The system can simulate all the necessary pain responses for a character to believe that he or she has been injured, and that character will suffer the appropriate damage from being wounded. However, characters will not die if they take damage that exceeds their physical Condition Monitors. If a character "dies" during the scenario, the VR feed takes that runner off-line and keeps him or her unconscious until the other runners awaken, so that all the runners can be debriefed together. Take aside any player whose character dies and explain to him or her what has happened. The runner should awaken along with the other characters about the time that the terrorists capture the facility.

The VR system also cannot simulate the effects of astral projection to the metaplanes because the experience is so subjective. An initiate character who attempts an Astral Quest will fail, because his or her real-world astral projection abilities are being inhibited and the system cannot simulate that experience. Do not offer the player any explanation for this effect.

Getting Out

The only way the runners can exit the VR simulation is by completing the scenario, at which point the simulation terminates and the runners wake up. Even if they figure out that they are in a simulated environment, they cannot leave until they have played out the scenario because the VR neural feed "short-circuits" their normal voluntary responses, including the magical abilities of magicians. This means that the characters cannot even sense their physical bodies, much less get them to move. In fact, the runners cannot even tell that they still *have* physical bodies. If they assume that their bodies no longer exist, do not reassure them. Let them worry about it for a while.

A SIMPLE RUN

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

Another night, another run. Your fixer told you this one would be simple, with minimal complications. Right. If you had a nuyen for every time you've heard that one, you could retire tomorrow. Still, you need the cred. And there's an exception to every rule. Isn't there?

The meet's supposed to go down at the Eye of the Needle tonight. Ritz place—your Johnson sure has some nuyen to spread around. You dress in your best "make-an-impression" threads and show up right on time. When you inform the snotty elf maitre d' that you're with the Johnson party, his lips twitch in what looks vaguely like a smile and he leads you quietly to a private room. You hear the faint hum of a white-noise generator; your meeting will definitely be a private one. The elf seats you and tells you that Mr. Johnson will be with you shortly.

As promised, "Mr. Johnson" turns up in just a few minutes. She's a knockout—a tall, willowy elf with snowy white hair that cascades down to her shoulders and deep, blue eyes that seem to drink in the light. Her deep brown complexion makes a striking contrast to her light hair and eyes, and she looks at home in her finely tailored dress and expensively tasteful jewelry. She introduces herself by name—Carla Brooks, head of security for Dunkelzahn's presidential campaign. As you pick your chin up off the floor, she continues: "My boss needs a few people for a simple run—a straightforward job, with minimal complications."

There's that line again—"a simple run with minimal complications." The only cliché you've heard more often is, "Never deal with a dragon." Or anyone working for one. On the other hand, if a dragon wants you on his payroll can you really afford to say no?

HOOKS

Give the runners the impression that they're playing in the big time in this scene. The whole setting should reek of high class and people with nuyen to burn. Carla Brooks acts like the soul of grace and charm throughout the discussion of the job. Give the runners the feeling that this could be their big break. Emphasize that pulling off a run for the Big D could earn them some *serious* bennies in the future.

BEHIND THE SCENES

Brooks invites the shadowrunners to dine with her before they get down to business. She's charming and mildly flirtatious, talking and laughing as if she has known the runners for years and they are all out for a casual night on the town. She invites the runners to select whatever they like from the menu, recommending several dishes that she thinks they might like. Her suggestions show impressive insight into the runners personal tastes. During the meal she chats pleasantly with the characters, recounting anecdotes about working with Dunkelzahn. She does not reveal any really good gossip but hints that she knows all sorts of interesting things about the dragon—and things are especially interesting now, with his presidential campaign in full gear and his home base moving to Prince Edward Island.

If the runners ask why Carla is here talking with them instead of sticking close to Dunkelzahn at this busy time for his campaign or how the dragon can spare her from the campaign trail to have dinner with a bunch of shadowrunners, she looks serious and says that they will get down to business shortly. She tells them that she has an important proposition for them but does not go into detail.

Once dinner is over and the wait staff have cleared the table, Brooks begins to talk business with the runners. Her pleasant manner becomes brisk and businesslike as she describes the proposed run, stating that it must be handled delicately and that it has Dunkelzahn's *personal* attention.

The job calls for the shadowrunners to go to DeeCee and plant a sophisticated surveillance device on the limousine of one of Dunkelzahn's political rivals. The runners will have considerable latitude in carrying out the run, just as long as they keep to the prescribed timetable. Carla will arrange for them to get the information and equipment needed for the run once they are in DeeCee. If they bother to ask, Brooks will tell the runners that Dunkelzahn wants out-of-town talent because the shadows in DeeCee are being watched too closely; the entire city is crawling with rumors and shadow-activity involving the presidential campaign, and law enforcement authorities are keeping a sharp eye on things.

Brooks ends by offering the runners a flat payment of 20,000 nuyen each in whatever form of currency they prefer: 5,000 up front for expenses and the remainder on completion. If the characters want to up the stakes, the group may make a single standard Negotiation Test against Brooks (p. 72, **SRII**); Brooks will not put up with too much haggling, so individual runners cannot make their own tests. If the test fails, Brooks tells the runners they can "take it or leave it."

DEBUGGING

If the runners seem reluctant to take on this run, remind them that refusing a job from Dunkelzahn could be damaging to their reputations, especially if the Big D should get elected. Having a great dragon hacked off at you is bad; if he's running a country, it's even worse. Also, having the future president of the UCAS as an employer could bring the runners a lot of benefits. Having him as a enemy could be the last mistake the runners ever make.

If the runners are feeling especially paranoid, have Brooks give them whatever assurances she can that this run is straightforward (it's not, but she has no qualms about lying to the runners and can do so quite convincingly). If the runners use some kind of magic to determine if Brooks is telling the truth, it does not work because she is wearing enough magical countermeasures on her person to neutralize it.

If the runners are foolish enough to threaten or even attack Brooks, remind them that dragons have long memories. Brooks may be dining with them alone, but she is not stupid. As Dunkelzahn's head of security, she likely has ample firepower just an eye blink away.

Because the players may not know that Dunkelzahn has a head of security, they may need convincing of Brooks' identity. Brooks needs an answer immediately, and so she is carrying multiple forms of identification, including a video statement from Dunkelzahn (via his translator, Nadja Daviar) confirming Brooks' identity and position. If these credentials do not convince the runners, have various restaurant patrons stop by the table and say "Hello": high-ranking elven diplomats, business contacts from the Big Eight megacorps, even a few rich backers of Dunkelzahn's presidential bid.

OFF AND RUNNING

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

The first-class UCAS Air flight from Seattle to DeeCee has been quiet and pleasantly terrorist-free, giving you a chance to relax, enjoy a complimentary drink or two and sleep a bit. You could get used to traveling like this. You wake up and stretch just as the plane begins its final approach to Thomas Jefferson airport: a steeply banked turn toward the landing strip gives you a terrific view of the sprawling nation's capitol. From up in the sky you can't see the dirt and desolation of the metroplex—you see only the clear blue sky reflecting off the bright white marble of all those monuments and government buildings. It's not at all like the real Federal District of Columbia—it looks more like one of those documentaries you see on the tridi.

You get off the plane and breeze through the airport—null problem, thanks to Ms. Brooks. Now you're back in the reality you're used to: waiting at some dive to meet a contact and get all the particulars that you'll need to get things rolling. You've got a pretty good feeling about this run, and never mind old sayings about dragons. There's a real buzz going on in DeeCee; you can practically feel biz in the air. The election is lighting a fire in the shadows as the fat cats start to figure out just how much they depend on runners to do their dirty work.

You notice a burly ork in a plaid jacket heading toward your booth. From Ms. Brooks' description, this must be your contact. He looks you up and down as he approaches, keeping a perfect poker face. Looks like it's show time.

Once the runners have a chance to plan privately, read them the following:

In the privacy of your safe house, you look over the data Dubronski gave you. According to the mission specs, you're supposed to plant the listening device on the undercarriage of the limousine that will ferry former Vice President James Booth to and from a fundraising dinner at the Jefferson Tower Hotel in two days. The transmitter must be planted in time for the return trip from the fund-raiser, sooner if possible, but no more than 12 hours before the event to reduce the chances of the feds spotting the device. The bug has sophisticated shielding that will prevent most scanners from picking it up. So all you need to do is sneak into a federal VIP garage, plant a bug on the vice-president's limo, and get out again with no one the wiser. Piece of cake, right?

HOOKS

This scene sets up the basics of the VR shadowrun—what the runners need to do and the parameters within which they must work. How the runners actually handle the run is up to them. In fact, Dunkelzahn has had them brought here primarily to see how they handle things on their own. Carefully read over the details of the mission and allow the runners to formulate their own plans.

This section also sketches out some possible tacks that the runners might take, but no written adventure can cover every possible plan a group of players might formulate. Use the material presented as a guideline and be prepared to improvise if necessary to fill in the blanks. Give the players all the information that Dubronski gives the runners, then let them come up with a plan for planting the bug. Encourage the players to be creative.

BEHIND THE SCENES

From this point in the adventure until **Pulling the Plug**, the runners are not in the real world. They are drugged during their flight from Seattle (something in those complimentary drinks) and retrieved at the airport by Dunkelzahn's operatives posing as a DocWagon team. The operatives transport the runners to a secret VisionQuest facility near Mason City, Iowa, and hook them up to the VR simulation. A few slight modifications to the VR feed make the runners believe that they dozed off briefly on the plane before arriving in DeeCee. Everything that they think is happening in the District of Columbia is actually part of the virtual-reality program.

The runners' contact in DeeCee is a fixer named Dubronski, who provides them with the information and materials they will need to do the job. Dubronski meets the runners at a pre-arranged site, an out-of-the-way dive on the outskirts of the city. He gives them the surveillance device, plus an optical chip with the mission specifications: complete data on security at the VIP garage, specs of the Secret Service matrix system and the timetable the runners are expected to follow. In addition, Dubronski arranges to provide whatever equipment the runners feel they need. As long as the request is not too outlandish (for example, military-grade hardware or anything specifically governmental or "top secret"), Dubronski can acquire anything that the runners need in 24 hours or less. (Considering that everything the runners are experiencing is a VR illusion, finding them hardware and supplies is a snap.)

DUBRONSKI'S CHIP

The chip contains all the information the runners need to get started on the run. Their primary target is the garage where federal VIPs' limousines are kept. They must enter the secured garage, plant the bug on Booth's limo and get out without raising an alarm. If they arouse the suspicions of the feds even for an instant, the run will fail. The feds will give all the vehicles in the garage a thorough sweep and discover the bug.

The garage's security is described on p. 105. If necessary, modify these parameters to better suit your player group and improvise any other measures required that are not covered here.

The primary challenges the runners face are finding out which limousine will be transporting Booth so that they can plant the

transmitter well in advance and dealing with the Secret Service agents responsible for overseeing Booth's transportation. If the players think of it, they may attempt to learn the limousine's planned route as well. This knowledge may enable them to plant the bug while the vehicle is in transit and eliminate the need to break into the garage.

The Bug

The surveillance transmitter that Dubronski gives the runners is a small, flat metallic box about the size of a paperback book, crammed with sophisticated electronics. It has a magnetic pad that will adhere the device to any ferrous metal surface so strongly that the device cannot be removed without tearing the surface apart.

Any runner with Electronics Skill who bothers to examine the bug should make an Electronics (6) Test. If the test succeeds, the runner notices that the surveillance device is inefficiently designed. Whoever built it included several redundant components and systems (presumably intended as backups) in its design. The device also includes some fairly sophisticated electronic countermeasures that should enable it to avoid most forms of electronic detection. If the runners ask Dubronski about the design of the transmitter, he tells them that they're not being paid as electronics consultants—their job is to get the transmitter onto the target. If the runners suggest making or using a smaller transmitter, Dubronski says, "Look—just do what you're told and take the cred, OK? Save your brilliance for figuring out how to get the bug in place."

Physical Security

The VIP garage has three underground levels, a street-level lot, plus a single-story administration building. The entire building is made of reinforced materials and has a basic but reasonably sophisticated alarm system. The limos and other vehicles are kept underground, below street level.

The windows of the administration building are constructed of armored glass with Barrier Rating 9, while the exterior walls are made of reinforced plascrete with a Barrier Rating of 20. The interior walls and doors are Barrier Rating 6. The administration building sits to one side of the broad ferrocrete parking lot, surrounded by a three-meter fence topped with three strands of monofilament wire. A guard shack stands next to the fence's single gate. Getting past the gate requires an encoded passcard and a check by the gate guard on duty. The monowire atop the fence does 4S damage to any fence-climbing character who fails a Perception (6) Test to notice it.

Floodlights provide Partial Light (p. 89, **SRII**) to the entire parking area at night. All vehicles are kept in the underground garage after hours, leaving the ferrocrete empty of cover and the *entire area clearly visible from the building to the fence.*

The exterior doors of the administration building are secured with Rating 6 maglocks that accept specially encoded passkeys. Interior doors to sensitive areas, such as the elevator to the underground garage, are secured with Rating 4 maglocks. Each of these locks is equipped with a Rating 5 voice-recognition system, which the player characters must bypass to gain access.

Alarm System

The administration building's alarm system consists of perimeter detectors on the exterior fence and motion sensors placed throughout the building. The perimeter detectors automatically spot any character who touches or attempts to climb the fence. Characters may defeat these detectors by achieving 3 or more successes on an Electronics (6) Test. Each Electronics Test takes five minutes; for every five minutes that the runners wait by the fence, make a Perception Test for the guards against the lowest of the player characters' Stealth Attributes.

Once inside the building, the runners can defeat the internal motion sensors by moving very slowly and making successful Stealth (5) Tests on the way in and out.

Guards

The parking facility has three guard shifts, each consisting of a shift supervisor and 12 guards who cover the building, grounds and garage in teams of two. Use the Corporate Security Guard archetype (p. 205, **SRII**) for the guards and the Security Executive archetype (p. 116, **Corporate Security Handbook**) for the supervisor. The guards are equipped with AK-97 Carbines (30 (clip), SA/BF/FA, 6M) and Partial Heavy Armor with helmets (7/5).

Magical Security

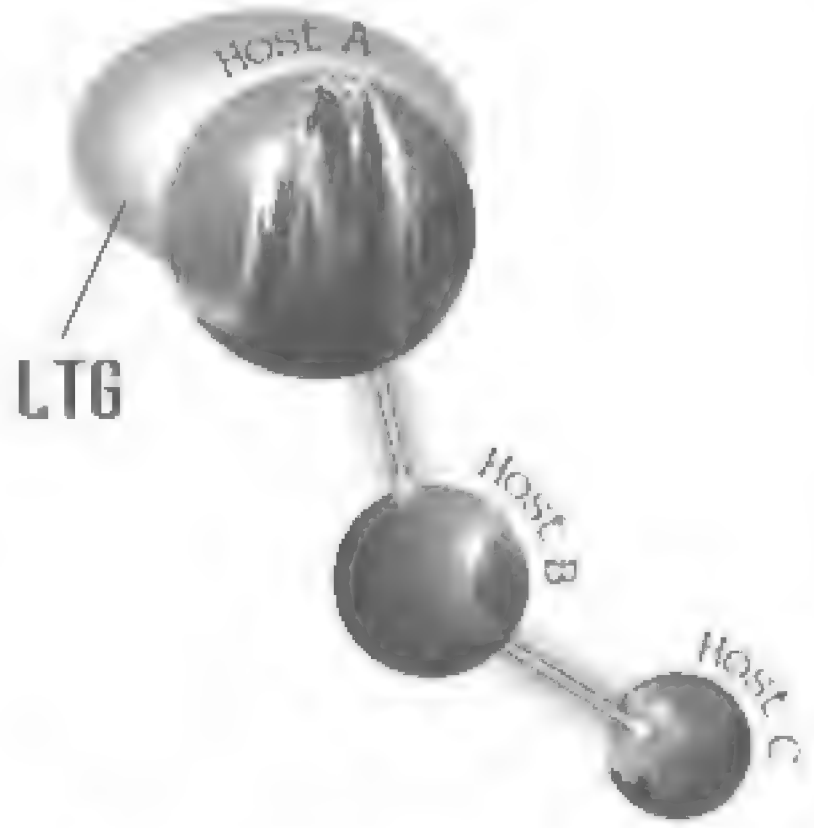
The underground levels of the garage are protected on all sides from astral intrusion by the natural soil and rock surrounding them. The building above and the external garage doors are protected by a Rating 6 ward that conforms to the shape of the outer walls. A Force 4 watcher spirit patrols the ward's perimeter. Use the normal Astral Patrolling Rules (p. 92, **Grimoire II**) for an area of 5,000 meters. A government security mage (Combat Mage archetype, p. 50, **SRII**) oversees on-site magical security from a Secret Service facility in downtown DeeCee. She astrally investigates any disturbance of the ward or any report from the watcher spirit, arriving 2D6 turns after the disturbance accompanied by a Force 5 air elemental.

MATRIX SECURITY

At some point, the team's decker should access the Secret Service matrix system to get or alter data about limo assignments. The VR simulation has an accurate model of that system running on a "virtual machine" within the simulation's larger system (pp. 34–35, **VR 2.0**). Likewise, the decker's deck and utilities are VR simulations but they appear to work in the normal way. The following system works according to the rules supplied in **Virtual Realities 2.0**, except that any damage the decker takes from any IC is not real. This means that the decker cannot be killed, only rendered unconscious.

Secret Service Matrix System

The Secret Service matrix system controls the assignment of personnel and resources for VIP trips of all kinds, including the limo ride in which the runners are interested. With the right access to the system, the runners can learn (or even assign) which limo Mr. Booth will be taking to the fundraising dinner and which Secret Service personnel have been assigned to his guard detail. Getting to that information might prove difficult, as the system's security is very sensitive. Any alert triggered by the team's decker could tip off the feds to the runners' plans and scrag the whole run, so the decker must use extreme caution and subtlety when dealing with the system's defenses (in other words, no running in and blasting anything that moves into pixels).



HOST A: Blue-4/8/10/9/9/8

This host provides public access to the system. All inquiries for VIP visits, scheduling appearances and so forth are routed through this host. The system is formatted in standard, boring UMS. The slave systems control day-to-day office equipment and the like.

Security Sheaf

Trigger

Step	Event
6	A display appears noting the penalty for unauthorized operations on a UCAS government system. This icon appears when the decker logs on and whenever the decker triggers another event on the sheaf.
11	Probe-5
18	A display asks the user to enter his name, SIN and commcode so the system can verify authorization. If ignored for more than 10 seconds, the system triggers Trace-8. If the decker wants to fool the system, he or she must make a Control Test.
25	Active Alert
30	Trap Probe-6 (Blaster-7)
37	Federal authorities alerted. A government decker comes online in 2D3 turns.
44	Shutdown

HOST B: Red-11/14/15/17/16/18

Host B is the security chokepoint between Host A and the secure data in Host C and the federal PLTG. This host contains no useful data, slave systems or other information—just lots of nasty IC intended to stop unauthorized intruders.

Security Sheaf

Trigger

Step	Event
3	Probe-8. The icon displays a warning and disclaimer of responsibility for damage to equipment used to gain unauthorized access, including a "Use of Deadly Force Authorized" sign.
7	Tar Baby-8
9	Trap Trace-10 (Killer-8)
12	Passive Alert
16	Expert Construct (Armor, +2 Defense/–2 Offense): Trace-8, Tar Baby-4, Marker-5
18	Cascading Blaster-8
21	Active Alert: Government decker alerted, arrives next turn.
23	Expert Construct (Armor and Shielding, +2 Offense/–2 Defense): Black IC-8, Acid-6
27	Cascading Black IC-7
29	Shutdown

HOST C: Green-10/17/18/13/15/14

Host C contains the paydata—all the sensitive routing information and security assignments for the motor pool, as well as itineraries for various VIPs' public appearances.

Security Sheaf

Trigger

Step	Event
5	Trap Probe-10 (Killer-11)
9	Party IC: Tar Pit-4, Killer-10, Marker-6
15	Trap Trace-8 (Sparky-10)
20	Passive Alert
24	Probe-11
28	Construct (Armor): Killer-7, Acid-7, Probe-4
33	Active Alert: A government decker is alerted and arrives in 1D3 turns.
39	Party IC: Blnd-rip-5, Acid-rip-5, Jam-rip-5, Mark-rip-5
43	Cascading Psychotropic Black IC-9 (Cyberphobia)
48	Shutdown

APPROACHES

The runners may plant the bug on Booth's limo in any manner they desire. The following entries describe various methods they may choose and gamemastering guidelines for those approaches. If your players use a method not described, simply improvise rules for it based on the suggested guidelines.

The Garage by Day

If the runners want to enter the garage and plant the transmitter during daylight hours, they must set up some kind of cover—entering the facility undetected during this time is virtually impossible. The facility's personnel run computer identity checks on any maintenance crews or other personnel that arrive to perform work at the site, so if the players plan to use such a cover they must defeat the computer check. A decker can do so by making a successful Control Test, which enables him to intercept the information request and return a positive confirmation. Such a deception lasts for 3D6 hours before someone discovers it, and so the runners will have to time their run very close to Booth's trip to ensure they are not discovered before completing their mission.

The Garage by Night

The runners are more likely to attempt to sneak into the garage at night and plant the surveillance device without anyone the wiser. Doing so requires overcoming the garage's security systems and getting past the guards undetected, as well as decking the computer system to discover which limo Booth will use. The runners must carry off the run without being discovered. Even if they plant the bug and escape after raising an alarm, the Secret Service carefully searches the entire motor pool and discovers the device.

En Route

Ambushing the limo en route and planting the device without raising suspicions can also be done, though it should prove difficult. The possible routes that the limo will take to the hotel are stored in the Secret Service matrix system. The computer randomly picks a route from the ones entered into it. The time between choices is also randomly determined, so that the exact route is not set until the rigger driving the car has downloaded it into the vehicle's online computer. Simultaneously, the route is downloaded into the Secret Service main office, the security systems at the limo's destination and at the VIP garage, and other assorted local and national security departments. Until then, no one knows the precise route any limo will take. After the download, the route can be snatched from multiple sources.

If the group discovers the limo's route, they may manipulate the traffic signals or take a similar action to delay the limo's arrival or to ensure the vehicle stops at a particular place and time. To do this, they must log on to the DeeCee city system. This system also includes information about the city sewers and any other city-run service in which the players may be interested. Devise whatever Matrix system you like for the city, based on the Secret Service system. And be prepared to use more deckers than IC—this is the government, and they are a suspicious lot.

At the Hotel

The transmitter does not need to be on Booth's limo until the return trip from the fund-raiser, so the runners may decide to plant it on the vehicle while Booth is in the hotel. This plan has a good chance of success if the runners can overcome Booth's Secret Service detail.

The driver and one Secret Service agent remain with the limo at all times, while the rest of the security team accompanies Booth into the hotel. The limo is parked in the hotel's underground parking garage, which has its own security guards (two at the gate and four others at the elevator and stairs). Use the Corporate Security Guard archetype (p. 205, **SRII**) for the guards and arm them with Fichetti Security 500 pistols [12 (clip), SA, 6L] and armor jackets (5/3). The runners will have to get past the hotel guards and the Secret Service personnel, plant the transmitter and get away with no one the wiser.

SECRET SERVICE PERSONNEL

The Secret Service personnel assigned to Booth during his trip are described in the following entries. Add additional details as needed. The team members are trained professionals who react intelligently to anything unusual. Their primary objective is to ensure Booth's safety. If they encounter anything unusual, they immediately inform the central office by radio and request backup if necessary.

Team Leader

Tom Fiske, a Secret Service veteran of thirteen years, has considerable experience in protecting VIPs, including two presidents. He handles his assignments with a calm, no-nonsense manner. Use the Bodyguard archetype (p. 49, **SRII**) for Fiske but give him Etiquette (Political) 4 and Security Procedures 5.

Security Magician

Monique Kurlen is the team's magician. She is government trained and somewhat inflexible in her thinking but skilled in her area of expertise. She has had conflicts with Fiske over procedure, but so far they have managed to set aside their differences and work well together. Use the Combat Mage archetype (p. 50, **SRII**) for Kurlen.

Physical Adept

Eldred O'Connor is the team's chief protection specialist in charge of guarding their subject. The youngest member of the protection team, Eldred feels he has something to prove to Fiske and Kurlen. Use the Executive Protection Adept archetype (p. 107, **Corporate Security Handbook**) for O'Connor.

Rigger

Kara Kiramatsu is the team's driver. She remains with the vehicle at all times and is trained in evasive-action and combat driving techniques. Kay-Kay (as she is known to her friends) is more comfortable on the road buttoned up in her vehicle than dealing with diplomatic situations. She does her job and lets the other members of the team do theirs. She thinks O'Connor is too much of a hot shot, but keeps her opinion to herself. Use the Rigger archetype (p. 59, **SRII**) but give Kiramatsu Car Skill 6 and Firearms 4.

Executive Protection Specialists

In addition to the four team members already described, three Secret Service agents are also assigned to Booth. Use the Executive Protection Specialist archetype (p. 110, **Corporate Security Handbook**) for these agents.

DEBUGGING

See **Really Unreal (Introduction**, p. 100) for hints on handling the characters' actions and perceptions while they are inside the VR simulation. Don't overplay the scene to the players; keep your descriptions fairly normal, with only hints of what is really going on. Things should look and feel pretty much as the runners expect them to, and so they won't start to notice anything unusual for a little while.

Dubronski stresses to the runners the importance of handling this job quickly and quietly—there is little point in planting a listening device if everyone in the world knows you're doing it. He also emphasizes the importance of sticking to the time restrictions that the runners have been given. If they can't do the job within the time allocated, they should forget about it—and also forget about seeing most of the money they were promised.

If the runners figure out what is really going on and decide not to go through with the shadowrun, they soon learn that completing the job is the only way they can escape from the VR simulation. If things bog down or if the runners flatly refuse to go through with the rest of the run, go to **Pulling the Plug** (p. 109).

PULLING THE PLUG

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

Your hazy senses begin to clear, and your cramped muscles shriek at the slightest movement. Harsh fluorescent lighting stabs at your eyes. You flinch, blink and try to sit up, brushing your hand absently against the cables and wires trailing from your head and arm as you look around to get your bearings.

The room looks like a hospital or clinic. The decor (such as it is) runs to sterile white-and-chrome surfaces. There are several beds, one for each of you, with various bio-monitors hooked up to them and connected to you by electrodes. Each of you is hooked into what appears to be access ports for some kind of sophisticated computer network. Just where have you *been* for the past few days, chummer?

You've barely begun to orient yourself and take stock of the situation when the sound of a gunshot outside the room makes you jump. Time seems to slow down as a hit of adrenaline surges through you. As you turn toward the source of the sound, two men in commando outfits burst into the room. They're both packing rifles, and they point them straight at you.

HOOKS

Play this scene as the all-time greatest action movie. The characters should be groggy, confused and a little in shock. Don't let them rest; have the thugs with guns push them around right away. In this scene, things go immediately from bad to worse for the shadowrunners as they awaken from their VR experience only to discover that the VisionQuest facility has been stormed by Human Nation terrorists. The runners are cut off from their normal resources and techno-toys and will have to think fast to avoid becoming just a few more terrorist-related death statistics.

BEHIND THE SCENES

While the runners have been busily performing their simulated shadowrun in VisionQuest's virtual reality system, things have been happening in the real world. A team of Human Nation terrorists opposed to Dunkelzahn's presidential campaign has captured the VisionQuest facility, holding the entire place hostage. As the player characters awaken, the terrorists are planting explosive charges throughout the facility. Through their leader, the bullyboys are demanding that the wyrm withdraw from the race. If Dunkelzahn refuses, the terrorists will set off the bombs, destroying the VisionQuest facility and everyone in it.

A dozen terrorists are in the facility, including the two the runners encounter upon waking in the VR room. All are well-trained, armed with sophisticated modern equipment and willing to die to accomplish their goal. The runners find it almost impossible to convince these fanatics to surrender, especially while the terrorists remain in a position of strength.

The terrorist commando team is composed of the leader, Jack Neelson (**Cast of Shadows**, p. 112); Mark Underhill, the team's rigger; and ten other commandos, including a decker (use the Decker archetype, p. 79, **Virtual Realities 2.0**). For Underhill's statistics, use the Rigger archetype (p. 59, **SRII**). For the remaining commandos, use the Mercenary archetype (p. 58, **SRII**). The commandos wear camouflage and armor jackets (5/3) and carry AK-97 assault rifles [38 (clip), SA/BF/FA, 8M]. Underhill has taken control of the facility's rigged security systems.

Though Human Nation does not trust magic enough to have a magician on the team, Neelson is familiar with magicians and magical warfare from his time in the UCAS Marines. Therefore, the player characters find it difficult to surprise him with a magical attack. Neelson also forces VisionQuest's on-site security mage to help him by tracking the movement of personnel in the facility. The security mage may try to contact the runners and enlist their help if he can do so without the terrorists' knowledge; otherwise he follows Neelson's orders and does his best to track down the runners through the facility's wards and watchers. For the security mage's statistics, use the Corporate Wage Mage archetype (p. 56, **SRII**).

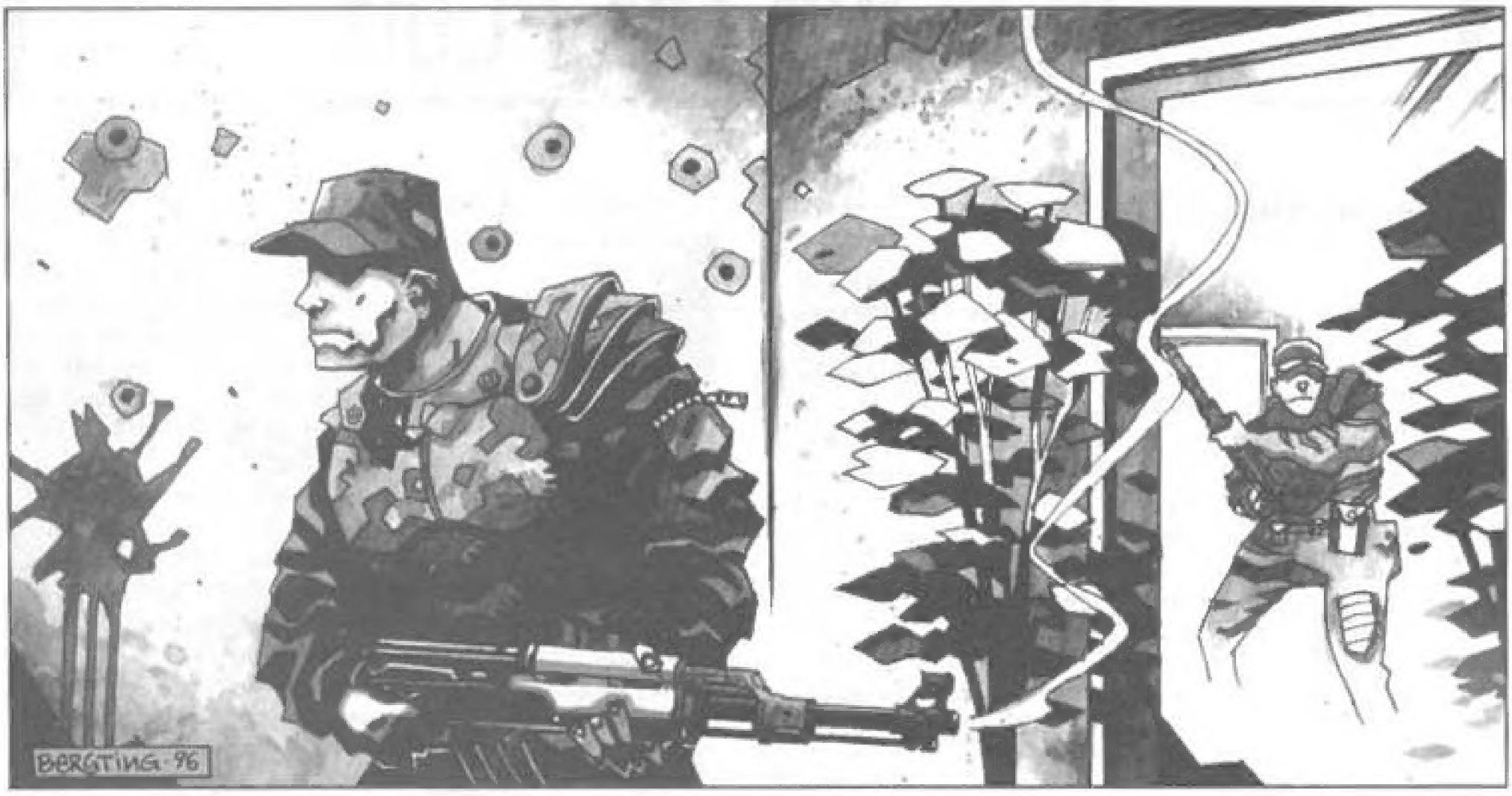
ON THE RUN

The shot in the corridor gives the runners enough warning to ensure that the commandos' sudden appearance does not take them by surprise. The terrorists have just killed a security guard in the corridor and enter the VR room expecting trouble. Roll Initiative normally when the terrorists burst into the room. They try to capture the runners alive but kill them if they fight back. The runners have no equipment other than their cyberware, no armor, no shoes, and no clothing aside from hospital-style "pajamas."

If the characters fight the terrorists, run the combat normally. The runners are at a significant disadvantage, but they outnumber the terrorists and probably have much greater skill at unarmed combat. Despite their lack of weapons, they should be able to overpower both commandos without too much difficulty. If the runners attack the two commandos, one of the terrorists attempts to contact the group's command post through his throat-mike radio. To prevent the terrorists from alerting their comrades, the runners must kill or incapacitate them both in a single action.

If the runners overcome the terrorists in the VR room, they can take the commandos' equipment (and, if they think of it, their radios). Once equipped, the runners can attempt to deal with the other terrorists or simply bug out, leaving the hostages to their fate.

The terrorists have taken control of the facility's security systems, with their rigger running the main security console. The runners must escape detection by the rigger as they move through the facility. Use the rules for Closed-Circuit Simsense (pp. 32, 102, **Corporate Security Handbook**) or have the runners make opposed Stealth Tests against the rigger's Intelligence (6) whenever they pass through a room or corridor.



The terrorists have used the facility's security protocols to isolate it from the outside. The exterior doors are all closed and sealed with Rating 8 maglocks. The doors themselves are Barrier Rating 14 and very difficult to force open with anything other than explosives or magic. In addition, a Force 6 ward covers the exterior walls and doors—any magic must break through the ward to affect them.

The runners' best options for getting out are attempting to overcome the rigger's control of the security systems (virtually impossible without the proper equipment) or sneaking around and picking off the terrorists one by one.

Gearing Up

The equipment taken from the runners before the virtual-reality run is in the facility's security station, currently occupied by Underhill and one other commando. If the runners can get to their equipment, they greatly improve their chances against the terrorists.

WORKING FROM WITHIN

If the runners surrender or are captured, the terrorists take them to the cafeteria where the other personnel have been herded together under the watchful eyes and powerful guns of the commandos. Jack Neelson is in the cafeteria, working with his team's decker to send his demands to Dunkelzahn and the authorities. A trid crew from Seattle-based KSAF is on a comm-line, trying to get an interview. The runners see no one in the room that they recognize. If they quietly ask any of the technicians and office workers what happened, they can get a clearer idea of what is going on.

Captured runners can attempt to overcome the terrorists but will have a difficult time of it because they are unarmed and under guard. Neelson will want to question the runners a few minutes after his commandos bring them in, and he orders his guards to pay special attention to them if he thinks they pose any danger. The commandos blindfold and bind the hands of any character who has used magic before being captured.

DEBUGGING

If the terrorists seem to be too much trouble for the runners, the gamemaster can do several things to help the team recover. For example, make it easier for the characters to retrieve their equipment; have it stored in a less secure location that one of the facility workers tells the runners about or have the runners receive covert help from several VisionQuest employees. The security mage makes a particularly good ally.

Alternatively, especially cruel gamemasters can further hobble the runners by saddling them with temporary mental damage caused by the VR shadowrun, along with impairment of their cyberware and/or magical abilities caused by whatever preparations the VisionQuest technicians made to connect the runners to the VR simulation. Some of the runners' gear, such as magical foci, might be missing or stored separately from the rest of their possessions.

If the runners seem inclined to escape without trying to free the hostages, let them. Remind them, however, that they have no idea where they are or what they will find outside. They could use some help from the VisionQuest employees to figure those things out. Remind them also that it's a bad move to leave behind an enemy who might have outside allies.

PICKING UP THE PIECES

If the runners successfully overcome the terrorists, they receive a comm call from Carla Brooks advising them to disappear from the VisionQuest facility before the authorities arrive. She instructs the VisionQuest staff to give the runners a vehicle and directions to Minneapolis (about 3 hours north of the facility) or Des Moines (about 3 hours south). Once the runners arrive at either destination, they find plane tickets under Brooks' name waiting for them at the local airport. They also receive the agreed-upon sum for the shadowrun, plus a bonus of 5,000 nuyen each.

Credit for the terrorists' defeat goes to VisionQuest's security forces, and Carla Brooks is extensively interviewed about the incident. Dunkelzahn's political campaign flacks use the event as further proof of the dangerous unrest and high degree of dissatisfaction plaguing the UCAS, taking this opportunity to reemphasize that Dunkelzahn's unifying vision might represent the country's only hope for stability.

If the runners cannot overcome the commandos, they get caught in a fire fight between Dunkelzahn's security forces and the Human Nation terrorists. Carla Brooks' security people assume that everyone not known to be working for VisionQuest may be a spy, and so they detain the runners until Brooks shows up. She ensures that the runners remain "guests" at the facility until the heat dies down, then lets them go. After the runners are released, they discover that the VR setup has been replaced with a health spa. No one in the area will believe their story about the VR simulation.

AWARDING KARMA

Award team Karma as described below. Award individual Karma per standard rules (p. 199, **SRII**).

Survival	1 point
Threat	1 point
Successfully completing the virtual run	2 points
Overcoming the terrorists	1 point

CAST OF SHADOWS

The following characters are described in order of their importance to the story.

CARLA BROOKS

As the woman who runs Dunkelzahn's personal security arrangements, Carla Brooks has gained the trust of one of the most powerful beings on the planet. Poised and confident, Brooks knows exactly what she wants done and almost always accomplishes it. She is utterly loyal to Dunkelzahn, as much out of personal respect as because he pays her salary. Though she is at home in posh hotel suites and fancy restaurants, Brooks prefers spending time on the job with her security team. In return, her security personnel consider her the perfect commander—intelligent, competent, honest and scrupulously fair.

Attributes

Body: 4
Quickness: 4
Strength: 4
Charisma: 5
Intelligence: 5
Willpower: 6
Reaction: 4 (10)
Essence: 1.775

Initiative: 4 (10) + 1D6 (4D6)
Threat/Professional Rating: 3/4

Skills

Electronics: 3
Etiquette (Corporate): 5
Etiquette (Security): 6
Firearms: 5
Interrogation: 2
Leadership: 5
Negotiation: 5
Stealth: 2
Unarmed Combat: 4

Cyberware (all delta grade)

Active Softs
Crypto Circuit (Level 10)
Cybereyes (Camera, Flare Compensation, Low Light, Optical Magnification 3, Retinal Clock, Rangefinder, Thermographic)
Datajack
Display Link
Radio with Com Link X
Skillsofts
Skillwire Plus (Rating 9)
Smart Link II
Softlink (Level 4)
Wired Reflexes (3)

JACK NEELSON

The leader of the Human Nation attack on the VisionQuest lab, Neelson is a former UCAS Marine dishonorably discharged for assaulting a metahuman while off-base. Turned over to civilian authorities for punishment, Neelson served several years in prison before being paroled. While in prison, Neelson became aware of the Humanis Policlub through jailed members of its more radically anti-metahuman splinter groups. After his parole, he found work as a mercenary. He became increasingly involved with Humanis and eventually worked his way up the hierarchy into the shadowy Human Nation, using his combat skills to further the racist group's agenda.

Neelson firmly believes that metahumans pose a personal threat to him and his way of life. He considers them all "mutations" and "perversions" of the human form; they are carriers of a terrible plague at best, subhuman creatures at worst. He feels no guilt over killing metahumans, rationalizing that they must die to safeguard his own race. He carefully looks after the men and women under his command but understands that tactical sacrifices are sometimes necessary and that every soldier knows the risks.

Attributes

Body: 5 (6)
Quickness: 6 (7)
Strength: 6 (7)
Intelligence: 4
Willpower: 5
Charisma: 3
Reaction: 5 (9)
Essence: 1.1

Initiative: 5 (9) + 3D6
Threat/Professional Rating: 5/4

Skills

Armed Combat: 5
Athletics: 5
Car: 4
Etiquette (Military): 4
Firearms: 7
Leadership: 4
Stealth: 4
Unarmed Combat: 6

Cyberware

Cybereyes w/Low-Light and Thermographic
Datajack
Dermal Plating (1)
Muscle Replacement (1)
Wired Reflexes (2)

Gear

Ares Predator II [Heavy Pistol, 15 (clip), SA, 9M, w/10 extra clips]
Armor Jacket over Form-fitting Body Armor